

Organise



Libcom's organising toolkit - guides to organising at work, in your local area and more.

Workplace organising



A set of tips and advice guides for organising in your workplace. From basic principles and getting started, to making demands, taking action such as strikes, and winning them.

Organising at work - the basics



A basic introduction on why we should organise at work, and a few tips on how to get started.

Almost everyone in this society is underpaid and over-worked. Many temps, contract and casual workers have very few rights, and permanent workers are still always under the threat of redundancy. Many people are massively exploited and ill-treated, and in Britain over 20,000 people are killed at or by their work each year*. Millions more suffer stress, depression, anxiety and are injured.

The indignity of working for a living is well-known to anyone who ever has. Democracy, the great principle on which our society is supposedly founded, is thrown out the window as soon as we punch the time clock at work. With no say over what we produce, or how that production is organised, and with only a small portion of that product's value finding its way into our wages, we have every right to be pissed off at our bosses.

At work in a capitalist society, we are forced to labour in return for a wage. Employers hire workers, and pay us less than the value of work we do. The surplus amount is taken from us and turned into capital - profit for shareholders and corporate expansion. Thus all workers are exploited. Consequently, we all have a shared interest in getting a bigger share of the fruits of our labour, as well as in winning better working conditions and shorter working hours.

We can do this by organising at work. [Workplace organising on libcom.org](https://libcom.org/resources/workplace-organising) is a resource to assist all workers in improving our jobs in the here and now, and we also believe that by organising to fight, we build the seeds of a new world - not based on capitalist exploitation but on co-operation between workplace collectives where production is democratically decided by worker/consumer

councils and working hours are slashed. Harmful or useless industries, such as arms manufacturing, or the banking and insurance industries, could be eliminated.

The real essentials, like food, shelter, and clothing, could be produced by everyone working just a few hours each week. Environmentally destructive industries purely concerned with profit, such as fossil fuel power plants could be converted to use clean, renewable energy sources.

Building this better world, and counteracting the day to day drudgery of contemporary wage-slavery we think can best be done using direct action in the workplace. Direct action is any form of action that cripples the boss's ability to make a profit and makes them cave in to the workers' demands. Different ways of taking action are outlined [here](#).

All of the tactics discussed on this site depend for their success on solidarity, on the coordinated actions of a large number of workers. Individual acts of sabotage offer little more than a fleeting sense of revenge, which may admittedly be all that keeps you sane on a bad day at work. But for a real feeling of collective empowerment, there's nothing quite like direct action by a large number of disgruntled workers to make your day.

Article written by libcom.org and combined with an edited article by the Industrial Workers of the World

* Estimated at 21,663 in 2001. Sources: [CCA](#), [TUC](#), [Hazards Campaign 2002](#)

Organising your workplace - getting started

You're working, or just started work somewhere where there is no active collective workers' organisation. What can you do to get organised? This guide will help you get started.

Nowadays many workplaces have no active workers' organisation. Depending on whereabouts you are in the world and what sector you work in there may or may not be much of a [trade union](#) presence. And even if there is it may just be a skeleton organisation which only represents workers with individual problems, and is unable to win demands of management. Or worse, it could be actively in cahoots with management against the workers.

Hardly, surprisingly, therefore that one of the most frequently asked questions by workers is - "What can be done at my workplace to improve things? It seems impossible, the bosses are too strong."

We would suggest that the following should be considered:

Ask questions and listen to the answers

Where do you begin? Some people when they first feel that they have been treated unfairly fly into a rage or start loudly crusading against the boss. This can be dangerous. [Management](#) jealously guards its authority in the workplace, and when you begin to question authority, you become a threat. In most workplaces, from the moment you begin to question authority, you become a troublemaker in management's eyes. If you have never before made any waves where you work,

you may be shocked, hurt or angered by how quickly management turns against you. This is a good reason to be discrete when you begin to talk to others.

Talk to your fellow workers

Ask them what they think about what's happening at work. What do they think about the problems you're concerned about? Listen to what others have to say. Get their views and opinions. Most people think of an organiser as an agitator and rabble-rouser (and there are times when an organiser must be those things), but a good organiser is first of all one who asks good questions and listens well to others. Having listened well, you should be able to express not only your own views and feelings, but also those of your colleagues. The main concerns could be pay, but this isn't always the case. Sometimes, their concerns can be reactionary, such as keeping immigrant workers out, so you will need to be aware that not all concerns are necessarily progressive.

Take note

Keep a record of workers' concerns, and any significant incidents at your workplace such as an accident, a disciplinary or even threatening behaviour by a manager.

Learn about the past

Try and find out what other attempts, if any, have been made to organise the workers. It may be that there was once a union but it has collapsed.

Do some general reading around organising in the workplace and the lessons people have learned. Our [workplace activity tag](#) has dozens of accounts of organising. If any issues come up as part of your organising, you should also feel free to ask for any assistance in our [organise forum](#).

Try to find allies

Almost inevitably there will be some people who are more concerned about the problems we face than others, and a few of those people will want to do something about it. Those few people now form the initial core of your "organisation". You might ask the two most interested people to have coffee or lunch with you, introduce them to each other, and then ask, "What do you think about this?" If they are indeed ready to do something and not just complain, then you are almost ready to begin organising.

Map your workplace

Knowledge is power. Or at least it is the beginning of power. You will want to know everything you can about your workplace and your employer. This will be a long term, on-going process of education.

Try and find out as much as you can about the company you're working for. Does it have more than one factory or shop? Is it a public company, how many people work for it, who owns it? Companies have to do publish the accounts, so getting hold of these from the relevant agency (such as Companies House in the UK) can be extremely useful. Try and build up a picture of the firm and people who work for it - for example, an increasing problem is that workers are 'off the cards' and not working legally. Some workers may have problems with their immigration status.

You should begin your research with your department. Management has long understood the value of identifying [informal work groups](#), their natural organisers, and their weak links. In fact, one of the main thrusts of management training is to develop strategies to alter the psychology of the workplace.

For example, the multi-national [United Parcel Service](#) has developed its psychological manipulation techniques into a fine art. The UPS managers' training manual, entitled Charting Spheres of Influence, shows how to map the workplace to identify the informal work groups, isolate natural organisers or instigators in these groups, exploit the weak links, and in the end, break up the groups if they can't be used to management's advantage.

While most companies have not developed their techniques into the fine Orwellian art that UPS has, many do use some of the same methods. Have outspoken workers, instigators or organisers been transferred, promoted into management or singled out for discipline? Are work groups broken up and rearranged periodically? Has the layout of the workplace been arranged to make communication between workers difficult? [1](#)

Do you get to walk around on your job? Who does? Who doesn't? Are certain people picked on or disciplined by management in public? How does this affect the rest of the workforce? Do you feel you are always under surveillance? You get the point. All of the above can be used to break up unity and communication between workers in your workplace. Incidentally, this training does not make our employers invincible, or make our efforts any less worthwhile (despite all the training their management had received, UPS workers won a mass strike in August 1997).

Let's say that you have an important message to communicate, but you don't have the time or resources to reach every one of your fellow workers. If you can reach the natural organisers in the informal work groups and get them on your side, you can bet that the word will get around to everyone. Once organisers have been identified and agree to co-operate, it is possible to develop a network which can exert considerable power and influence.

Informal work groups also have the advantage of creating certain loyalties among their members. You can draw on this loyalty to figure out unified strategies for problems, and take advantage of people's natural tendency to stick up for those who are close to them.

Besides working with the group organisers, it is important to draw in the loners too. More than likely, their apathy, isolation, or maybe anti-union ideas stem from personal feelings of powerlessness and fear. If collective action can be pulled off successfully and a sense of security established through the group's action, fear and feelings of impotence can be reduced.

If you have got a particularly tough character in your workplace who seriously threatens unity, don't be afraid to use the social pressures that work groups can bring to bear to get that person back in line. This applies to supervisory personnel too, especially the supervisor who likes to think he or she is everyone's pal.

The balance of power

The bottom line for this type of workplace organisation is to tilt the balance of power in the workers' favour. It can win grievances for example. If grievances remain individual problems or become the

responsibility of union officials, the natural organisation and loyalty that exist among work groups is lost. Chances are that the grievance is lost too.

However, if the work groups can be used to make a show of unity, the threat that the work process could be disrupted can be enough to force management into a settlement. Grievances can only be won when management understand that a grievance is no longer the concern of an individual, but instead has become the concern of all, and that problems lie ahead unless it is resolved.

Starting organising

Meet

When the time is right hold a meeting of those you have identified as being interested in getting organised. Do not be surprised if some workers do not turn up, don't get disappointed. The meeting should be as open as possible and discuss all issues which concern workers. The most obvious concern will be how to get the mass of workers involved. Every person who attends the meeting should be expected to see if there are other workers who can be got involved. Stress the importance of ensuring that management doesn't get to know about what's happening.

Unions

You and colleagues may decide that you want to try to join an official trade union and get recognition with your employer. You should think hard about this form of action, as it may or may not be appropriate depending on your place of work. Workplaces with high staff turnover and lots of agency workers, for example, will be unlikely to be able to maintain a functional union organisation. Similarly, a union will only be able to win from management what you and your colleagues are able to obtain by your actions. So ultimately what counts is what action you are prepared to take collectively, rather than the union. And joining in official union will tie you into official procedures and labour laws which may be highly restrictive in terms of what action they permit you to take.

Publicity

At some point a leaflet will need to be produced and either distributed secretly at work or by friends when the workers are leaving the workplace. These actions will undoubtedly bring to management's attention that some workers are involved in trying to organise.

Demand

When it is felt appropriate (which could be a period of a few weeks to many months) another larger meeting of all interested workers will need to be organised. Use the meeting to draw up a list of grievances and demands. The meeting will need to elect spokespersons to approach management.

Support

If you are going to embark on some form of campaign, you may want to try to get support, especially practical support from outside your workplace. There may be local community groups, church groups, political organisations, anarchist groups etc which may be able to assist with practical initiatives such as leaflet production, a place to meet, people to help picket, etc.

Accountability

Don't allow negotiations with bosses take place behind closed doors. Keep all meetings transparent.

It won't be easy

Be sure that the workers know that their actions may lead to the threat of dismissal and/or dismissal. Never con workers into believing it will be easy. Discuss what this would mean if all or some workers are dismissed as this will require a decision to either [strike](#) and/or [occupy the workplace](#). The situation in countries where unions are outlawed is different and it will be impossible for workers to approach management. In such circumstances, [sabotage of production](#) may be appropriate.

[Read more about taking different kinds of action at work...](#)

Write history

Keep a record of your attempts at organising - workers struggles are so rarely recorded that valuable experience is being lost and workers have to go through the same problems. Many of them could be avoided. Feel free to post your account to our [workplace activity tag](#).

This article was significantly by libcom.org in 2012. Originally it was edited by libcom in 2005 from articles by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#) and another from an original article in [Revolutions Per Minute](#) issue 1, in 1996, as then produced by the members of the Colin Roach Centre, updated in February 2003.

- [1. There is an interesting article in our library here on informal work groups and management's opposition to them](#) by Swedish group Kampa Tillsammans.

Organising at work - some basic principles



The following is a list of what successful organisers say are the most important principles to remember:

Question Authority

Organising begins when people question authority. Someone asks, "What are they doing to us? Why are they doing it? Is it right?" Encourage people to ask, "Who is making the decisions, who is being forced to live with the decisions, and why should that be so?" People should not accept a rule or an answer simply because it comes from the authorities, whether that authority be the government, the boss, the union - or you. An effective organiser encourages their fellow workers to think for themselves.

Talk One-to-One

Almost every experienced activist agrees that "The most important thing about organising is personal one-to-one discussion." Leaflets are necessary, meetings are important, rallies are wonderful, but none of them will ever take the place of one-on-one discussion. Frequently, when you have simply listened to one of your fellow workers and heard what is on his or her mind, you have won them over because you are the only one who will listen. When you talk to Linda at the next desk and overcome her fears, answer her questions, lift her morale, invite her to the meeting or take her to the rally - that is what organising is all about.

Find the Natural Organisers

Every workplace has its social groupings of colleagues and friends. Each group has its opinion makers, its natural organisers, its instigators. They are not always the loudest or most talkative, but they are the ones the others listen to and respect. You will have gone a long way if you win over these natural organisers.

Get People Involved in Activity

Life is not a school room and people do not learn simply by going to meetings or reading leaflets. Most people learn, change, and grow in the process of action. Will you take this leaflet? Will you pass it on to your friend? Will you sign this petition? If you want to develop new organisers, get your colleagues involved in the organising.

We Are the Union!

The point of organising is not only to get individuals involved, but to join them together in a solidarity conscious group. We want to create a group which sees itself as a whole: Will you come to the meeting? Can we get the whole department to visit the boss together? Can we count on all of you on the picket line?

Activities Should Escalate Over Time

Ask people to become involved in activities of increasing commitment and difficulty. Are you willing to wear a union badge? Will you vote for a strike? Are you prepared to stand on a picket line? Are you willing to be arrested? Some union campaigns have included hundreds of people willing to go to jail for something they believed in. For many of them it started with that first question, "Will you take this leaflet?"

[Read more about taking direct action at work...](#)

Confront Management

Organising is about changing power relationships, the balance of forces between management and workers. Confrontation with the employer has to be built into the escalating activities. If people are not willing to risk upsetting the boss, they won't win.

Win Small Victories

Most movements, from a small group in one workplace to massive social protests grow on the basis of small victories. The victories give us confidence that we can do more. They win us new supporters who now realise that "you can beat the boss". With each victory the group becomes more confident and therefore, more capable of winning larger victories.

Be Prepared For Setbacks

Nothing runs smoothly in life, and organising is no exception. If it doesn't succeed at first, be patient. Circumstances always change with time, new people come and go. Perhaps in a few months time your fellow workers will be more interested than they are at present. Sooner or later your employer will do something which will help that process.

Don't Forget The Outside World

Conflicts between workers and their employers have a large influence on the confidence of other workers to stand up for themselves. It is in our interests to build links and networks of support with workers employed in other companies and industries, for through standing together we will greatly increase our ability to win more control over our lives.

Produce Your Own Publicity

This is the best way of getting your message across, but don't forget to let your fellow workers get involved in its production.

[Read some tips on publicity and media...](#)

Have A Sense of Humour

Don't be deadly serious in everything that you do: organising can and should be fun. Use cartoons, songs, jokes and stories. Try and relate your publicity not just to the harshness of reality but also to your aspirations and desires.

Organising is Everything

Organisation need not be overly formal or structurally top heavy, but it must be there. A telephone tree and a mailing list may be all the organisation that you need, but if those are what you need then you must have them. Make sure your organisation is directly democratic, and any specialised positions you have, such as secretary, are instantly recallable. The last twenty years have supplied many examples of reform movements which fought hard, made some gains and then disappeared, simply because they didn't stay organised. As one union organiser, Bill Slater, says, "Only the organised survive."

[Read more general organising tips...](#)

Don't Organise Alone

Contact the Industrial Workers of the World, or other radical workers and join up with other working people who will be more than willing to help you. The IWW, or other libertarian groups can also provide resources which will be of vital importance in any organising drive, no matter how small. Together we can do the things that we cannot do alone.

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#).

Dealing with bullying at work guide



Advice and tips on how to survive bullying and intimidation in the workplace, and ways of dealing with individually, legally, or collectively.

Cuts in staffing and resources, increasing workloads, performance related pay: all have made work more pressurised. The University of Manchester says bullying accounts for up to half of all employment stress. The few studies done show the majority of incidents are by bosses, but it's still important to support people being bullied by work 'mates'. Call it what you will: harassment, aggression, coercive management, intimidation, or things seen as 'just a joke' - all are common labels for what is really bullying. Racial or sexual harassment, or that based on sexuality or disability, may also take the form of bullying. Bullying is any long-standing aggression, physical or psychological, by an individual or group directed against someone who is unable to defend themselves. It is rarely confined to insulting remarks or open aggression, but can be subtle, devious, often taking place when there are no witnesses, and be difficult to confront for those whose confidence and self esteem have been worn down. It is a myth that only quiet or 'weak' people will be victimised since a bully will also pick on the popular or successful if they're perceived as a threat. Widespread bullying by bosses is hardly surprising in world which is structured hierarchically - the rich living off the working class, men dominating women, adults abusing children... Work is similarly organised, to control the behaviour of workers with management positions providing the perfect situation for bullying.

Bullies tend to surround themselves with supporters, spies and 'court jesters' while cultivating allies in senior management. The bully will create rivalries in the workforce, as people anxiously fight to stay in their favour, creating a divisive culture which brings out the worst in people. To be 'in' with a bully can seem the best way to survive, and cover any feelings of inadequacy by displacing these on to others, through siding with the bully's aggression. But as long as a bully feels that they can get away with it they will continue.

A living nightmare

Being bullied makes people feel vulnerable, isolated and frustrated, and may lead to stress related illnesses like constant headaches, loss of weight, ulcers or kidney problems. It affects relationships with family and friends:

"Bill gradually became quiet and withdrawn. I knew that it had something to do with work, but whenever I tried to make him talk about it, he became very irritable. He lost weight, too, and lost interest in everything. He would sleep for hours on end... for three years there was no laughter in our house."

Those being bullied often feel ashamed and that they must have done something to deserve it, which opens them to more bullying.

Spotting bullying

Spotting what's going on early puts you in a much stronger position. Problems often arise when a person is new or recently promoted. The earliest sign is that a relationship at work doesn't feel right: is your boss responding to you in a different way; do you feel put down by belittling remarks or continual criticisms of your work, even though the standard hasn't changed; are you beginning to feel that supposed mistakes are all your fault? Other signs are constant assessment, useless errands, false complaints, persistent humiliation in front of others, and a boss's inability to admit they could be wrong.

A bully will try to get rid of someone they perceive as a threat; not promoting able people, taking credit for others' ideas or work, or alternatively not giving enough work or responsibility and then claiming laziness or lack of initiative.

Surviving

In dealing with bullying it is important not to be undermined and try to remain positive, though this is easier said than done. Try to take responsibility for your feelings and behaviour, keep things in perspective and don't let it dominate your life. However deflated you feel, make time to do stuff you enjoy. Talk things over with friends, many of them will have had a similar experience. You could try self-defence or assertiveness training, as this may help you cope better.

Initial tactics: stand firm against verbal attacks - tell the bully you won't tolerate personal remarks. Keep calm and say what has to be said quietly and coherently, and if they try to shout you down, just repeat yourself and keep doing so until they listen (or more likely walk off). If instructions are unclear, ask for written clarification, suggesting this will improve your performance; this can be useful as evidence. Remain confident in your own judgement and ability. Avoid being alone with the bully if you can.



The law

There's no specific legislation dealing with bullying at work. Employers have a legal duty to protect employees' health and consult safety reps about health and safety matters, which includes bullying as it's a workplace stress. Safety reps have legal rights: to inspect the workplace and to take up health and safety complaints, with paid time off for their functions. Bullying involving a sexual racial or disability aspect may be challenged under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, or Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Unions should have policies to deal with bullying, making clear that it will not be tolerated. The complaints procedure should set out on what basis the bully may be suspended pending the results of an investigation. Independent counselling should also be available. Bullying is not just some deviant behaviour which can be eliminated by having the correct policies, but such procedures can form the basis around which to organise (see the excellent Solidarity Federation pamphlet: 'Health and Safety at Work' on overcoming the pitfalls and problems of relying on legislation and the unions – email [solfed \(at\)solfed.org.uk](mailto:solfed@solfed.org.uk) for more information).

Fighting back

Check your job description isn't being abused. Keep a detailed diary, including dates, times and locations, of every verbal attack, contrary or arbitrary instruction, or where your competence was questioned. Write to the bully after incidents, challenging them, and keep copies of relevant correspondence and memos. When making a complaint stick to the facts and avoid character assassination. It's probably a good idea to send copies of your complaint to senior management. Wherever possible, insist on a witness, either a friend or union rep, being present at meetings. Tell your doctor what's happening as they will usually give you a sick note giving you time to recover and plan your next move. It's important to state the cause, and name the bully on the sick note as it can be a very important piece of evidence.

Making a complaint may make things worse and lead to increased vindictiveness and being labelled a trouble-maker. Confrontation can be unsafe when it's done alone. Bullying usually affects several members of staff, and the more people experiencing it the stronger your case and potential allies. The staff of one school responded to problems with their headmaster by avoiding further argument, keeping silent, and not reacting. The head's self-satisfied smirk was replaced with a puzzled 'what are they up to now?' expression:

"Although this did nothing to alter the practical problems, we felt better because it was no longer the headmaster calling the tune."



Quietly build solidarity with your colleagues, being careful who you talk to, and when you have enough information use it. Be creative: paste a caricature of them on noticeboards, PCs etc. If desperate deface their notes, property, car etc. with suitably, poignant life questions, but be careful, remember CCTV and don't get caught. If you need assistance you can contact SolFed: using an outside group can be very effective, assuring anonymity, but it's no replacement for solidarity at work.

Last resort

As a last resort you can always resign and try to prove to an industrial tribunal that you were forced to leave due to intolerable conditions. You must be employed for two years and will need a detailed log of the abuse to be able to claim 'constructive dismissal'. Tribunals will examine particular recorded incidents of abuse but their main interest is in whether the correct procedures were followed. A request for an acceptable reference can be built into a winning claim. Compensation varies. In an out-of-court settlement won by Unison, a social worker in Scotland in 1996 received £66,000 after being forced to retire through ill health, caused by bullying by her superior. A health visitor was awarded £5,000 damages in 1997 from North East Thames Community Care NHS Trust, after persistent undermining by a nursing manager.

Organising against bullying can have a knock-on effect and help build wider confidence and solidarity in the workplace as Bob, a postal worker, explains:

"Management are constantly trying to get information out of us so they can make cuts and increase profits but we do everything we can to sabotage their efficiency drives. It's our knowledge and experience which one day will be used to transform our working lives for the benefit of all. In the meantime, we have an ongoing guerrilla campaign on our hands... and that includes against union bureaucrats along with the bosses. Sure, we are not as solid as we would all like, but the basic uncooperative attitude is always there."

Written by the Red & Black Club, Part of the [Solidarity Federation](#).

Guide to taking strike action

Tips and advice on how to effectively organise and carry out strike action at your workplace.

Our labour is the ultimate weapon that workers possess. Without workers bosses cannot make a profit. Strike action can be very powerful, but at the same time it, at the very least, reduces take home pay. More worryingly it may also lead to dismissal. Hardly, surprising therefore, that strike action is usually last resort taken of workers.

Now, in the UK at least, the vast majority of workers have very little experience of organising or being on strike. Here are some tips if you are forced to take such action and/or you are locked out by management.

While striking is sometimes necessary, on-the-job action, such as Good Work Strikes, Go-slows, or Working-to-Rule can be more effective.

Read more about on-the-job direct action...

Involving everyone

It is vital that all those on strike are directly involved in activities either in the form of picket duty, collecting cash, speaking or touring around, making contacts, speaking at meetings etc. These activities should not be confined to strike committees or more experienced members - by involving everyone this can help prevent boredom and stop isolation and demoralisation. Every striker should be encouraged to take part as it gives a purpose to the strike and helps make strikers class conscious. The most effective and inspirational way to involve all strikers is to regularly hold mass pickets.

Direct democracy

All strikers should be involved in the democratic running of the dispute through being on a daily basis. If tasks are rotated this should ensure that each striker builds up his/her organising experiences. As many decisions as possible should be made (and be seen to be made) when all strikers are present. If a list of peoples' specific skills are drawn up at the beginning of the dispute it can give strikers a start to organise from.

Here are some suggestions of skills and tasks to get things working for you - they may not all apply to your situation but all the issues in this list need to be considered:

- Picketing
- Visiting workplaces, community centres and trade union meetings to speak and raise money
- Preparing resolutions for other union branch meetings
- Organising petitions and financial collection groups for outside supermarkets, workplaces etc
- Treasurer/s to oversee all monies coming in and being spent
- Producing posters and leaflets and other publicity
- A research team to investigate the company's finances, draw up a list of political contacts in other union branches, other unions, workplaces etc
- A press co-ordinator to issue statements to the press (including left-wing press)

- A welfare officer to attend to any striker's personal difficulties and to suggest forms of assistance - financial particularly but also legal assistance when someone is arrested and/or charged
- Entertainments group - to organise fund-raising social nights. These can help draw in other workers, and demonstrate to strikers' families and friends they are also seen as part of the struggle.
- Newsletter editors - a regular strike bulletin (daily if possible) is needed to let people know what is happening. This helps prevent rumours and can hold the strike together. The bulletin should encourage contributions from as many strikers as possible. This can be written and produced very quickly using Desk Top Publishing equipment if it is available.
- Legal officer - especially when people have been arrested and are awaiting trial, such a person can assist solicitors in getting statements. S/he may also wish to try and get legal observers at the pickets - these can help put some pressure on the police to behave properly.
- The most effective way to ensure direct democratic control of any dispute/strike action by those workers directly involved in it is to hold weekly (or more often) mass meetings. These should be used to discuss and democratically decide the conduct of the dispute and to elect people to run it on the striker's behalf between strike/dispute meetings.
- A strike committee (or action group, or whatever name is decided) should be elected by a mass meeting and thereafter accountable to, and anyone replaceable by, another mass meeting, if the strikers decide this is necessary. This group will co-ordinate the day to day work created by the decisions at the mass meetings. Any posts or committees should also be democratically elected in this way - there should be no appointments. The strike committee should include a secretary (takes minutes and co-ordinates on going work), treasurer and a chair (for meetings).

Cash

If a strike is to last then finance should be sorted out as quickly as possible - those on strike are going to run out of money very quickly without any wages coming in. Official unions often set up fighting funds but if controlled by union officials, the money obviously can't be controlled by the strikers.

In 'official' disputes small amounts of strike pay can usually be arranged by the union but not in 'unofficial' disputes.

Part of the strike committee should be given the responsibility for raising funds. All monies must be controlled by the strikers themselves - if it is controlled by the union bureaucracy then disagreements over the strike or tactics can lead union officials to threaten the strike by withdrawing the funds.

Factory/workplace collections are the usual source of money. Appeals should also be made to unions and community organisations. The biggest collections are usually made when a striker has had the opportunity to speak to other workers. There is nothing as inspiring to other groups of workers as hearing from people on strike.

Every penny should be accounted for. Any distribution of the funds should be made in a way agreed at a mass meeting. This will often cause problems but it must be done and be seen to be done. A treasurer should be accountable to the strike committee in between mass meetings.

Media

This usually involves strikers' bulletins, leaflets for the general public, translation of materials and articles in newspapers. This should include the left-wing press, anarchist and socialist, which will be

supportive. The most important communication, however, is direct - from worker to worker. Public meetings, including street meetings, can also be used to gather support. Leaflets need to be printed in all relevant languages.

Official or unofficial

Even today most strikes are unofficial, and it is almost certain that any strike for union recognition will be 'unofficial.' In brief the terms are used to define strikes which are covered by trade union legislation (which will differ in different countries) and those that are not. Trade Unions can have their assets sequestrated if they support a strike not covered by trade union legislation.

We would argue that it is not that important whether a strike is official or not, if a group of workers are forced to take strike action then they should be supported, full stop. If the union officials don't support this then tell them to get lost.

Full-time officials

There is a very long history of trade union officials initially giving support to a strike, offering help and assistance and then leaving the strikers to their own devices. It is essential that every strike committee should prepare their fellow members and strikers for this eventuality, financially, physically and psychologically.

This means that the strikers should organise independently of the union bureaucrats from the start and must seek to be self-supporting. Strikers need to be able to rely for aid and solidarity outside of the officials and bureaucracy.

The full-time official (usually appointed by other bureaucrats rather than elected by the workers) is supposed to represent and be under the control of the strikers. In reality, this rarely happens. The official's decisions will often (usually?) be what the union solicitor says is the best strategy, which in practice means anything is possible as long as it is within the anti-union laws, or their interpretation of it.

Union officials will wish to avoid, at all costs any threat to the funds of the union. If union officials do attend strike meetings it should be made clear that s/he is a paid official and should therefore be expected to do as the members want - not the other way round. Beware: union officials sell out.

'Revolutionary' groups

These are not well supported at the moment. If they come and offer support demands should be placed on them and their members. They should be expected to respect strikers' wishes. Those that do respect strikers' wishes usually find a better hearing for their ideas in times of discussions, particularly during difficult periods in the strike.

A strike must not be subordinated to boost the potential of a revolutionary group over the needs of the people on strike. Collection sheets and materials should be headed with the strikers' logo/slogan and not that of the revolutionary organisation. This makes good sense anyway - many people are reluctant to give to such groups, and are more willing to give to a group of strikers.

Direct action/solidarity/flying pickets and anti-union laws

It is essential to put a daily picket on the workplace(s) which is the source of the strike. However, unless it is a very large workplace (involving hundreds of workers) then very few strikes

are ever won by keeping the action confined to the workplace(s) at the core of the dispute - strikers will quickly become isolated and eventually defeated.

If it is obvious that the bosses are not budging within a couple of weeks, then this may mean having to dig in and prepare for a lengthy battle. Solidarity action is the key to winning such a struggle. This means involving workers in other workplaces, usually with the same employers and sometimes unions. But not always, as other workers in and out of unions, often with different employers, are used to produce goods or do work to offset the loss of production at the source of the strike.

By far the best and most effective way to win solidarity action is to picket the workplaces of the workers you want (and need) to involve. These are called flying pickets by militant trade unionists but secondary pickets by the bosses, who are shit-scared of them and wish to outlaw such solidarity action by the use of anti-union laws.

All full-time, repeat all full-time union officials, fall into line with the bosses and the State's laws when they are used or even threatened. In most cases the threat of action will usually result in the full-time official distancing him/herself from any strikers organising flying pickets.

If these laws are threatened or used then a strike can only be won if the striking workers and their supporters are prepared to defy the law, the bosses who use it and the trade union officials who will not break it.

'Break the law, not the strike, not the workers' movement - no state interference in the democratic running of a trade union or workers struggles.'

As picketing is so vital, then so is the control of workers on a picket line. Stewards should be elected by a mass meeting to control the conduct of all workers and their supporters on the picket line. If other workers are brought in to assist in picketing, then these people should be clearly identified by the strike committee on this basis and subject to the control of the same committee.

The strike committee must always retain the right to remove anyone from the picket line who they decide is acting contrary to the interests of the workers on strike and placing a dispute in jeopardy by their conduct. Drinking of alcohol should be banned on picket lines.

Contact should be established with sympathetic lawyers when a strike and picketing takes place, as action in the course of a strike could lead to harassment and arrest. Legal support is very important in such circumstances.

The building of permanent links between workers is vital during a strike - this is especially the case with workers in the same firm and/or industry - this will help in defeating future attacks on all workers.

Regular direct contact between workers, before, during and after a strike, can go a long way to breaking isolation and encouraging rank and file resistance.

Unemployed people and scabbing

To guard against scabs it is essential to work amongst unemployed people - alongside Claimants' Unions or groups - and, if possible, to organise them, so that unity of action can be established to fight threats to end their meagre benefits if they do not accept scab jobs.

Leafleting or picketing of dole or employment agency offices, especially when strikers' jobs are being advertised, is vital. Unemployed people should be encouraged to get involved in the strike. In the SITA bin workers strike of 2001, supporters leafleted employment agencies and blockaded coaches filled with replacement staff.

Discussion meetings

Discussion meetings between workers on issues relevant to a strike should be organised during and after the strike. This will encourage discussion and aid in the development of new ideas and tactics to use during the strike.

At the end of the strike the experiences of the workers should be written down. Successes and failures should be analysed and then they can be used in future strikes. Strikers may not win their particular struggle, but they can help others to learn from their experiences and win the next time.

Occupations

The most effective means of preventing the employer/company from resuming production during a strike, or of disposing of the premises and assets, is by occupying the plant. Unless the numbers on strike are very large then it is likely that 'outside' support will be needed, including from amongst the unemployed. Details, methods and planning can only be decided on the site and according to the circumstances prevailing. Occupations and work-ins were a major part of the struggles by trade unionists in Britain during the 60s and 70s.

Read more about workplace occupations...

Strike support groups

It is important that as soon as possible that an independent Strike Support Group is set up. The purpose of this is for strikers and supporters to decide how best to co-ordinate support for the strike. This Group must be accountable to the strikers and no actions which are not supported by the strikers should be initiated.

In conclusion

These are just some (very brief) suggestions and basic guidelines for the conduct (and hopefully success) of an industrial dispute or strike.

The essence of taking and winning strike action is to keep this completely under the direct control of the strikers themselves and independent of the trade union and political bureaucracies - large or small.

The real message is: to win a strike strikers have to be prepared to fight the full time union officials as well as all the other forces ranged against them. All full time officials will settle for something which is infinitely more in line with what the bosses want than what the workers have been or are struggling for.

Updated from Revolutions Per Minute issue 2 (published in 1996) February 24th 2003

Edited by libcom 2005

Wildcat or official strike action?



A discussion of the relative merits of official strike action or unsanctioned wildcat action. Wildcat action has the benefits of being outside the pro-employer union laws.

The best-known form of direct action is the strike, in which workers simply walk off their jobs and refuse to produce profits for the boss until they get what they want. This is the preferred tactic of bureaucratic unions but is one of the least effective ways of confronting the boss.

The bosses, with their large financial reserves, are better able to withstand a long drawn-out strike than the workers. In many cases, court orders will freeze or confiscate the union's strike funds. And worst of all, a long walk-out only gives the boss a chance to replace striking workers with a replacement, or "scab", workforce.

Workers are far more effective when they take direct action while still on the job. By deliberately reducing the boss's profits while continuing to collect wages, you can cripple the boss without giving some scab the opportunity to take your job.

Unofficial, or wildcat, action - that is, organised with other workers independent of union officials bypasses anti-union laws meaning there are no union funds to sequester and there is no obligation to provide the bosses with advance warning - giving them the opportunity to arrange scabs.

Direct action, by definition, means those tactics workers can undertake themselves, without the help of government agencies, union bureaucrats, or high-priced lawyers. Running to an Industrial Tribunal (or outside the UK the relevant arbitration board in your country) for help may be appropriate in some cases, but it is **not** a form of direct action, and they too are generally weighted in the bosses' favour, taking up a great deal of time and money.

Listed here are some of the most popular forms of direct action that workers have used to get what they wanted. Yet nearly every one of these tactics is, technically speaking, illegal. Every major victory

won by labour over the years was achieved with militant direct actions that were, in their time, illegal and subject to police repression. After all, for much of history the laws surrounding trade unions were simple - there were none. Strikers were routinely beaten and killed by police and soldiers and imprisoned with extremely harsh sentences.

After years of relentless struggle, the legal right of workers to organise is now officially recognised, yet so many restrictions exist that effective action is as difficult as ever. For this reason, any worker contemplating direct action on the job - bypassing the legal system and hitting the boss where they are weakest - should be fully aware of labour law, how it is applied, and how it may be used against labour activists. At the same time, workers must realise that the struggle between the bosses and the workers is not a badminton match - it is war. Under these circumstances, workers must use what works, whether the bosses (and their courts) like it or not. Listed in this section, then, are the most useful forms of direct action.

It is worth bearing in mind that the best weapon is, of course, organisation. If one worker stands up and protests, the bosses will squash him or her like a bug. Squashed bugs are obviously of little use to their families, friends, and social movements in general. But if all the workers stand up together, the boss will have no choice but to take you seriously. They can fire any individual worker who makes a fuss, but they might find it difficult to fire their entire workforce.

Solidarity is strength!

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#)

Dual power at work



The best way to get something done is simply organise and do it ourselves. At work this can take the form of dual power strategies - workers making changes to their work environment without seeking management approval.

Rather than wait for the boss to give in to our demands and institute long-sought change, workers often have the power to institute those changes on our own, without the boss's say-so.

Some practical examples:

Pay

The owner of a San Francisco coffeehouse was a poor money manager, and one week the wage packets didn't arrive. The manager kept assuring the workers that the cheques would be coming soon, but eventually the workers took things into their own hands. They began to pay themselves on a day-to-day basis straight out of the cash register, leaving receipts for the amounts advanced so that everything was on the up-and-up. An uproar ensued, but the cheques always arrived on time after that.

Conditions

In a small printing shop in San Francisco's financial district, an old decrepit offset press was finally removed from service and pushed to the side of the press room. It was replaced with a brand new machine, and the manager stated his intention to use the old press "for envelopes only." It began to be cannibalised for spare parts by the press operators, though, just to keep some of the other presses running. Soon enough, it was obvious to everyone but the manager that this press would never see service again.

The printers asked the manager to move it upstairs to the storage room, since by now it merely took up valuable space in an already crowded press room. He hummed and hawed and never seemed to get around to it. Finally, one afternoon after the printers had punched out for the day, they got a moving dolly and wrestled the press onto the elevator to take it upstairs. The manager found them just as they got it into the elevator, and though he turned livid at this blatant usurpation of his authority, he never mentioned the incident to them. The space where the press had been was converted to an "employee lounge," with several chairs and a magazine rack.

Breaks

Workers in one London office thought it unfair that only smokers were allowed to take 5-10-minute breaks whenever they pleased, so decided that all workers should be entitled to these breaks. Without asking management or HR, staff decided to just start taking them, and inform new members of staff of this "rule".

There are thousands of similar examples - why not think about what changed you can make in your workplace? Often systems and rules de facto implemented by workers can be difficult for managers to challenge afterwards for fear of rocking the boat or damaging a "co-operative" atmosphere.

Edited and added to by libcom from an article by the Industrial Workers of the World

Go-slow guide



Instead of striking, workers with demands that the bosses are unwilling to meet can collectively decide to start a go-slow. This article contains tips and advice.

By deliberately slowing the rate of work, all together, the bosses' profits are hit, without workers losing wages. If everyone sticks together in solidarity victimisation of individuals can also be prevented.

The go-slow, or slowdown, has a long and honorable history. In 1899, the organised dock workers of Glasgow, Scotland, demanded a 10% increase in wages, but met with refusal by the bosses and went on strike. Strike-breakers were brought in from among the agricultural workers, and the dockers had to acknowledge defeat and return to work under the old wages. But before they went back to work, they heard this from the secretary of their union:

"You are going back to work at the old wage. The employers have repeated time and again that they were delighted with the work of the agricultural labourers who have taken our place for several weeks during the strike. But we have seen them at work. We have seen that they could not even walk a vessel and that they dropped half the merchandise they carried; in short, that two of them could hardly do the work of one of us. Nevertheless, the employers have declared themselves enchanted with the work of these fellows. Well, then, there is nothing for us to do but the same. Work as the agricultural labourers worked."

This suggestion was obeyed to the letter. After a few days the contractors sent for the union secretary and begged him to tell the dockworkers to work as before, and that they were willing to grant the 10% pay increase.

At the turn of the century, a gang of section men working on a railroad in Indiana were notified of a cut in their wages. The workers immediately took their shovels to the blacksmith shop and cut two inches from the scoops. Returning to work they told the boss "short pay, short shovels."

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#)

Good work strike



Advice and tips on taking good work strikes. Good work strikes involve doing your job to help customers, not bosses and can involve distributing goods or services without demanding payment, and more.

Instead of a conventional strike, workers with demands that the bosses are unwilling to meet can collectively decide to have a good work strike.

One of the biggest problems for service industry workers is that many forms of direct action, such as [go-slows](#), end up hurting the consumer (mostly fellow workers) more than the boss. One way around this is to provide better or cheaper service - at the boss's expense, of course.

Workers at Mercy Hospital in France, who were afraid that patients would go untreated if they went on strike, instead refused to file the billing slips for drugs, lab tests, treatments, and therapy. As a result, the patients got better care (since time was being spent caring for them instead of doing paperwork), for free. The hospital's income was cut in half, and panic-stricken administrators gave in to all of the workers' demands after three days.

In 1968, Lisbon bus and train workers gave free rides to all passengers to protest a denial of wage increases. Conductors and drivers arrived for work as usual, but the conductors did not pick up their money satchels. Needless to say, public support was solidly behind these take-no-fare strikers. [Tram workers in Australia did likewise in 1990](#).

In New York City, USA, [Industrial Workers of the World](#) restaurant workers, after losing a strike, won some of their demands by heeding the advice of IWW organisers to "pile up the plates, give 'em double helpings, and figure the checks (bills) on the low side."

Edited by libcom from an article by the Industrial Workers of the World

Guide to sick-outs



Rather than call a conventional strike, the sick-in is a good way to strike without striking. Sick-ins involve organising workers to call in sick simultaneously.

The idea is to cripple your workplace by having all or most of the workers call in sick on the same day or days. Unlike the formal walkout, it can be used effectively by single departments and work areas, and can often be successfully used even without a formal union organisation.

It is the traditional method of direct action for public employee unions in the United States, which are legally prevented from striking.

At a New England mental hospital, just the thought of a sick-in got results. A shop steward, talking to a supervisor about a fired union member, casually mentioned that there was a lot of flu going around, and wouldn't it be too bad if there weren't enough healthy people to staff the wards.

At the same time - completely by coincidence, of course - dozens of people were calling the personnel office to see how much sick time they had left. The supervisor got the message, and the union member was rehired.

In [Denmark in 2006, 100 pilots went on sick-in in solidarity with striking pilots](#), and [in 1969, thousands of American air traffic controllers went on sick-out](#) for better conditions and wages.

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#)

Selective strikes

Rather than an all-out strike, rapid random stoppages can be highly effective. Here is some information about organising such selective, or lightning, strikes.

Unpredictability is a great weapon in the hands of the workers. In the US, Pennsylvania teachers used the Selective Strike to great effect in 1991, when they walked a picket line on Monday and Tuesday, reported for work on Wednesday, struck again on Thursday, and reported for work on Friday and Monday.

This on-again, off-again tactic not only prevented the administrators from hiring scabs to replace the teachers, but also forced administrators who hadn't been in a classroom for years to staff the schools while the teachers were out. The tactic was so effective that the Pennsylvania legislature promptly introduced bills that would outlaw selective strikes.

Firefighters have also struck just at certain times, just a couple of hours a day, losing the minimum pay but causing maximum disruption to management and potential strike-breakers.

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#)

Sitdown strike or occupation guide



A guide to taking sit-down strike action or occupations, in which by suddenly refusing to work gains can be won rapidly.

A strike doesn't have to be long to be effective. Timed and executed right, a strike can be won in minutes. Such strikes are "sitdowns" or "occupations" when everyone just stops work and sits tight, or "mass grievances" when everybody leaves work to go to the boss's office to discuss some matter of importance. This can have many advantages over a [conventional strike](#).

The Detroit [Industrial Workers of the World](#) employed the Sitdown to good effect at the Hudson Motor Car Company between 1932 and 1934. "Sit down and watch your pay go up" was the message that rolled down the assembly line on strikers that had been fastened to pieces of work. The steady

practice of the sitdown raised wages 100% (from \$.75 an hour to \$1.50) in the middle of a depression.

IWW theatre extras, facing a 50% pay cut, waited for the right time to strike. The play had 150 extras dressed as Roman soldiers to carry the Queen on and off the stage. When the cue for the Queen's entrance came, the extras surrounded the Queen and refused to budge until the pay was not only restored, but tripled.

Sitdown occupations are still powerful weapons. In 1980, the KKR Corporation announced that it was going to close its Houdaille plant in Ontario and move it to South Carolina. The workers responded by occupying the plant for two weeks. KKR was forced to negotiate fair terms for the plant closing, including full pensions, severance pay, and payment towards health insurance premiums.

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#)

Whistle-blowing guide



Sometimes simply telling people the truth about what goes on at work can put a lot of pressure on the boss. This page contains information on using information to winning improvements at work.

Consumer industries like restaurants and packing plants are the most vulnerable. And again, as in the case of the [good work strike](#), you'll be gaining the support of the public, whose patronage can make or break a business.

Whistle blowing can be as simple as a face-to-face conversation with a customer, or it can be as dramatic as the P.G.&E. engineer who revealed that the blueprints to the Diablo Canyon nuclear reactor had been reversed. Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* blew the lid off the scandalous health standards and working conditions of the meatpacking industry when it was published earlier this century.

Waiters can tell their restaurant clients about the various shortcuts and substitutions that go into creating the faux-haute cuisine being served to them. When their complaints about poor hygiene were ignored, [IWW Starbucks](#) union members in New York took photographs of rats and cockroaches in the coffee shop outlets and showed them to customers on picket lines.

On a related line - almost all businesses are very scared of a tax audit...

Just as [working to rule](#) puts an end to the usual relaxation of standards, whistle-blowing reveals it for all to know.

Whistle-blowers should be warned, however, that this carries a high risk of getting the sack - particularly in a small organisation - so be careful!

Edited by libcom from an article by the Industrial Workers of the World

Work-to-rule: a guide



A short guide to working to rule - taking industrial action without losing pay by following your work's rules so strictly that nothing gets done.

Instead of striking, workers with demands that the bosses are unwilling to meet can collectively decide to start a "work-to-rule".

Almost every job is covered by a maze of rules, regulations, standing orders, and so on, many of them completely unworkable and generally ignored. Workers often violate orders, resort to their own techniques of doing things, and disregard lines of authority simply to meet the goals of the company. There is often a tacit understanding, even by the managers whose job it is to enforce the rules, that these shortcuts must be taken in order to meet targets on time.

But what would happen if each of these rules and regulations were followed to the letter? Confusion would result - productivity and morale would plummet. And best of all, the workers can't get in trouble with the tactic because they are, after all, "just following the rules."

Under nationalisation, French railway strikes were forbidden. Nonetheless, rail workers found other ways of expressing their grievances. One French law requires the engineer to assure the safety of any bridge over which the train must pass. If after a personal examination they are still doubtful, then they must consult other members of the train crew. Of course, every bridge was so inspected, every crew was so consulted, and none of the trains ran on time.

In order to gain certain demands without losing their jobs, the Austrian postal workers strictly observed the rule that all mail must be weighed to see if the proper postage was affixed. Formerly they had passed without weighing all those letters and parcels which were clearly underweight, thus living up to the spirit of the regulation but not to its exact wording. By taking each separate piece of mail to the scales, carefully weighing it, and then returning it to its proper place, the postal workers had the office congested with unweighed mail on the second day.

Or imagine this: In the United States, BART train operators are allowed to ask for "10-501s" (toilet breaks) anywhere along the mainline, and Central Control cannot deny them. In reality, this rarely happens. But what would management do if suddenly every train operator began taking extended 10-501s on each trip they made across the Bay? Working to rule offers many possibilities for action, and if workers stick together they can win without losing any pay.

Edited by libcom from an article by the [Industrial Workers of the World](#)

Making the most of spontaneous rebellions at work

Advice on how to react when a big issue immediately angers a large number of people at your workplace, in order to try to organise effective action and build collective confidence for further disputes.

It would be nice if we always had tested and trusted structures in place able to respond to unexpected situations at work. Unfortunately this doesn't describe many workplaces where structures tend to be weak and disorganised or slow and bureaucratic. The situations that upset us the most are likely to be unanticipated. Sudden rebellion is most likely to develop as a response to unexpected decisions or circumstances i.e. unfair sackings, shift changes etc, and our actions need often be rapid and ad hoc. What follows is a few tips on how to make the most of these spontaneous rebellions at work:

1. Act quickly. In our experience the response to such things needs to be very quick. If we wait to ask people to go to a meeting a few days later then the incident will no longer be at the forefront of people's minds, the decision may have gained reluctant acceptance just by having been applied for some time, the initial fury will have passed, and so probably will the time to act.

2. Think carefully. Although we'll need to be acting quickly we have to think carefully and responsibly, which can obviously be hard when we are likely to be really angry. Is what we're doing going to lead to improvements or just lead to more job losses? Never is it more important to think as workers rather than political activists. Also, inform people as best you can, be honest about what the likely consequences of an action are and avoid giving people false hope.

3. Get everyone away from work. The next most important thing is to get everyone away from work, to stop doing the things we are supposed to be doing. Serving customers, answering phones, backing off coaches, stacking shelves, these things become ingrained responses and to get everyone to stop doing what they are supposed to be doing is a massive step that opens the door to various possibilities. As soon as we get away from work we are effectively on strike. Then they have to get us

to go back and the longer we can stay away the harder that is likely to be. Also, don't be put off if you work somewhere with fewer staff. Small places can sometimes mean you have more chance of success. If two of you make up 2/3 of the workforce, management are going to be a bit stuffed if you start refusing to work. However, this might depend on how easy it is for them to bring in new workers at short notice.

4. Don't talk to management. It is never a good idea in these early stages to enter into dialogue with management. It seems a very sensible thing to do but in doing so we inevitably get drawn back into the discourse of the company. It moves debate onto where they're strong; our strength is in our collective ability to stop working. Going to management makes us argue with them on their terms, not ours. In ten minutes of respectful dialogue you'll go from refusing a decision with collective power to asking management if they could change their mind (please), and inevitably to submission. Also, don't assume that going to a 'good manager' will bring you any more success. Even the 'good manager' can only act out company policy. Entering into negotiations with any set of bosses or bureaucrats stalls momentum and so is a bad move. Your best bet is to collectively refuse whatever decision has sparked off the rebellion.

5. Spread the struggle. Try to spread the strike through the company and the geographical area you work in, across industry. Go to different parts of your workplace telling them what's going on and try to get them out as well (or at least taking some sort of on-the-job action). This might seem an absurdly utopian suggestion but workers in a coffee shop in a bus station (for example) are inevitably going to be pissed off about something themselves and might join a spontaneous bus workers' strike, bringing their own demands to it. Regardless, a failed attempt to involve them might make them go away and think about the idea of getting involved should the situation arise again (whether at their current job or somewhere else). It's important to attempt to create a culture in which workers joining together in such a manner isn't seen as unusual.

Even when they aren't totally successful, these sorts of revolts can make management back off quite a bit, or at least take a more soft line, which opens up a certain amount of space for workers. To put it bluntly, unless they're thick as shit management won't be causing trouble for a while. And this will be a direct result of your actions.

Sabotage in the workplace



Sabotage is the generic term for a whole host of tricks, deviltry, and assorted nastiness that can remind the boss how much he needs his workers (and how little the workers need them). Here are some examples

The term "sabotage" derives from French factory workers throwing their wooden shoes ("*sabots*") into machinery to jam them and stop production. Sabotage refers to all activities which workers can undertake to reduce production or rate of work.

These can be minor activities such as making personal phone calls on work time to major destruction of property or information.

While most severe monkey-wrenching tactics are non-violent, most of them are major social no-nos. They should be used only in the most heated of battles, where it is open wholesale class warfare between the workers and the bosses. Listed below are some examples of more major sabotage.

Disrupting magnetically-stored information (such as cassette tapes, floppy discs and poorly-shielded hard drives) can be done by exposing them to a strong magnetic field. Of course, it would be just as simple to "misplace" the discs and tapes that contain such vital information. Restaurant workers can buy a bunch of live crickets or mice at the local pet shop, and liberate them in a convenient place. For bigger laughs, give the Board of Health an anonymous tip.

One thing that always haunts a strike call is the question of scabs and strike breakers. In a railway strike in 1886, the scab problem was solved by strikers who took "souvenirs" from work home with them. Oddly enough, the trains wouldn't run without these small, crucial pieces, and the scabs found themselves with nothing to do.

Of course, nowadays, it may be safer for workers to simply hide these pieces in a secure place at the jobsite, rather than trying to smuggle them out of the plant. In a more modern setting, some IT engineers can make sure software they write only works with their consent.

Use the boss's letterhead to order a ton of unwanted office supplies and have it delivered to the office. If your company has a toll-free number, have all your friends jam the phone lines with angry calls about the current situation, or a Freepost address can be bombarded with heavy mail. Be creative with your use of superglue. The possibilities are endless.

There are many examples of workplace sabotage outlined in our library:

<http://libcom.org/tags/sabotage>

Edited by libcom from an article by the Industrial Workers of the World

Solidarity against sexism on the shop floor



IWW member Angel Gardner goes over some ways of fighting sexism in the workplace through direct action.

If there is anything that I have learned from working in the restaurant and retail industry for over 14 years, it is that sexual harassment and sexism in the workplace is an issue that has not gone away. Perhaps you have become more tolerant of being sexually objectified. Maybe you are afraid that being uncomfortable with sexual advances or comments means that you are a prude or hopelessly outdated. The reality is that sexual harassment and sexism are all about power. We feel uncomfortable about standing up for ourselves in these situations because to do so questions power relations; not only in the workplace, but in society in general.

Is it sexual harassment or sexism in the workplace?

- A district manager asks you and your 40-year old female coworker, "Will you girls make us some coffee for our meeting?"

- Your manager makes all the women in the workplace wear tight baby doll t-shirts which are intentionally a size too small that say, “For a Good Time Call ...” while the men are told to wear plain black polo shirts that do not have to be form-fitting.
- During your training at a retail clothing store, you are told to flirt with potential customers to make sales. You feel uncomfortable with this and despite your efforts to be proactive about sales in a professional way, you are pulled aside later for not being “friendly enough.”
- A conventionally-attractive regular customer often sits at the bar and stares at you throughout your shift and has made several comments about your appearance that make you uncomfortable. When you tell him to stop, he says that you should be flattered. Your boss fails to act and your other coworkers, who appreciate his attention, tell you that you are strange for not liking it.

The answer: If any of these policies, attitudes or behavior makes you feel uncomfortable, then you should not have to deal with it. Everyone's comfort level is different. Some of your coworkers might not mind being called “girl” or “sweetie,” while others may take offense to being referred to as a “woman” or by any gender-specific pronoun. Different expectations for employee uniforms that force coworkers into stereotyped gender roles are sexist practices that create a potentially hostile workplace. Flirting with customers should never be a given, but a choice. Some people may find that they like the attention and get better tips by flaunting their appearance and flirting, but not everyone should have to interact in a similar fashion. Berating others for what makes them uncomfortable promotes an environment of harassment.

So you feel like a policy or an individual at work is creating a hostile work environment? Going the legal route is not always the best or solitary option. Collectively standing up together with your coworkers against sexist practices, policies or individuals can often be the safest and most powerful way to fight. Though it is technically illegal, it is easier for companies to retaliate against an individual than a group of workers. In addition, sexual harassment cases often result in companies dragging women through the mud and can prove to be very traumatic for the victim. Legal processes can take a long time to resolve, but taking direct action in your workplace is immediate. When workers come together to fight sexual harassment and sexism, we are empowered by taking back the workplace and at the same time, form closer bonds with our coworkers by building mutual trust and respect for one another.

How do I fight sexism and harassment in my workplace?

- Form a coalition with coworkers who share and/or are sympathetic to your concerns. Sexual harassment affects union and non-union members alike, so do not exclude any possible allies.
- Ban customers and clients who are repeat offenders from the store and make sure that the ban is being enforced by the rest of your coworkers.
- Confront your boss as a group about sexual harassment issues (perhaps even a definition) and make it known that you take it very seriously and so should they.
- Confront workers who refuse to support their fellow workers when they feel harassed, violated, or uncomfortable. Have one-on-one conversations about the impact of their actions (not respecting

boundaries) and words (“it's not a big deal”), and express your feelings in a genuine, but professional manner.

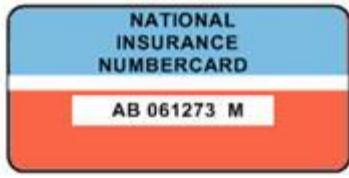
- Any policy, dress code, or expectations that fellow workers find to be sexist should be addressed, regardless of whether or not you've reached consensus. If you are required by your job to wear a tight baby doll t-shirt, but men can wear polos, you should also be able to wear polo, if you do not want to wear the t-shirt.

Originally appeared in the March 2011 issue of the Industrial Worker. Taken from [femenins](#)

UK specific guides

Sections of our workplace organising guide specifically about employment in the UK.

Employers who fail to pay employee tax and National Insurance



A guide for workers on dealing with employers who don't pay employee taxes or National Insurance. This can leave you unable to claim benefits if you become ill or unemployed.

Here's a real case of fraud that the government does nothing to stop meaning that rip-off bosses keep getting away with it.

Many people are unaware of a problem until they become unemployed or sick and need to claim contributory-based benefits. They will be refused these benefits and cannot win their appeal if no National Insurance has been paid.

No one has to accept this situation. Employers should be warned, in writing, that the Inland Revenue could be called in to check their books and that this could result in a jail sentence for avoiding tax. This is normally enough to make them pay up. The best way to avoid this situation occurring in the first place is to get a P60 when you start work, insist on regular pay slips, both of which you have a right to.

If you work in a more lawless trade such as the building industry legal avenues may not be as easily accessible, in which case there is always direct action. As the saying goes, if you are knocked, knock it down! It'll make them think twice before ripping the next poor bugger off.

Written by the [Walthamstow Anarchist Group](#)

Health and safety - the basics



Health and safety is important, this page is to help you know your rights.

Every year in the UK, over 20,000 workers are killed by their work. 246,000 workplace accidents are reported each year, and 1.2 million people believe they are suffering from a work-related illness. [1](#)

All employers should:

- Provide safe and healthy working conditions;
- Provide proper information and training for everyone in all types of workplaces;
- Draw up and circulate procedures for dealing with risks at work;
- Inform all workers of Health and Safety agreements, policies and practices before we start work.

Health and safety in the workplace costs money and time and hits profits, so bosses inevitably try to avoid their legal responsibilities. By law, they have to provide health and safety for all workers in their employment.

Remember, you have a legal right to walk off the job if you feel in imminent danger.

Casualisation Kills

Almost two million of us are now employed on a temporary basis. Hundreds of us die through work each year and many more are seriously injured. The vast majority of cases are easily preventable. Millions suffer crippling back pain, repetitive strain injuries and many other long-term injuries and illnesses simply because employers put profits first.

All workplaces are potentially dangerous and all work can kill - and the most vulnerable are temporary and agency workers.

The majority of temporary and agency workers are not self-employed but employees, with similar rights to other workers. However, our rights to basic Health and Safety are often neglected or totally ignored.

After only two hours on the job, Simon Jones, an agency worker in Brighton, was beheaded by a crane on Shoreham Docks. He had been sent to his death with no training or care for his life. This is just one shocking example among countless.

Recently, the courts fined a company just £6,000 for breaches of safety laws that led to a worker's death - so, £6,000 is the price of life at work in the UK today.

On average in the UK, 85 construction workers lose their lives in what the government say are mostly predictable and preventable incidents caused by some failure of management by employers (Tony O'Brien, Construction Safety Campaign).

For example: UK construction workers killed in 6 weeks in April/May 2003: 1 death each in Herefordshire, Bedford, Salisbury, Hillingdon, Staffordshire, Leicestershire & Leeds. 2 deaths each in Essex & Durham. 3 deaths in Wales. The youngest victim was aged just 17.

These are not just statistics, these are real people who met tragic and generally violent deaths, leaving families and friends going through the horror of bereavement.

Only by standing together can we prevent bosses from intimidating and victimising us. We cannot leave it to the Government, the bosses, political parties, or the established trade unions. The most effective way of defending our rights is by organising ourselves and taking collective direct action. By forming our own groups where everyone is equal, we can resist exploitation and enforce our rights at work effectively.

Defending our rights is just the start. Once we achieve this, we can start to take the initiative.

An injury to one is an injury to all!

:> [Read more about your rights at work...](#)

Edited by libcom from a leaflet by the [Solidarity Federation](#).

- 1. Source: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/tuc-18416-f0.cfm>. The global figure is estimated at 2 million by the ILO <http://www.hazards.org/haz81/twomillionkilled.htm>

Key employment rights

Knowing your rights: The stuff your boss doesn't want you to know. A brief guide to your rights at work in the UK as of 2003-4.

Please note that libcom.org do not have time to keep this guide continuously updated. We will keep this out of date guide up for reference, but recommend that people instead checkout a proper workers' legal rights resource like www.worksmart.org.uk for current legal information.

Regardless of work status (temporary or permanent, agency, full or part-time) or our contracts of employment, most of us have certain basic rights. These include:

1. *The right to be told in writing how much and when we are to be paid.*
Minimum pay is £4.50 per hour from October 2003 (up from £4.20). For 18-21 year olds it is £3.80 (up from £3.60). For agency workers, wages must be paid on the agreed day even if the hiring company has not paid the agency.

2. *The right to at least 4 weeks paid leave per year.*

Any employment contract should set out leave entitlements. If it doesn't, then 4 weeks must be given (which can include public holidays). All workers, agency workers, homeworkers,

trainees, so-called casuals and most freelancers are included in this. Holiday entitlement starts immediately, e.g. on day 1, we get 2 days leave, and, after 6 months, we get 10 days (for part-time workers it is less and it applies to jobs started since October 2001). NB many workplaces now sidestep this by allegedly factoring in holiday pay to your wages, thereby meaning you will lose money by taking the time off owed to you.

3. The right to breaks of at least 20 minutes during each 6 hours of work.

We are entitled to at least 11 hours rest in each 24 hours and a minimum of a day a week off. Rest breaks for under 18s are minimum 30 minutes every 4 1/2 hours.

4. The right to refuse to work any more than 48 hours each week.

We cannot be forced to work over 48 hours per week unless we have agreed to it in writing (note that this is averaged over any 17 week period, so we can be forced to do more in any one week).

5. The right to sick pay when we are ill.

We are entitled to statutory sick pay if we normally earn over £77 per week and we have been working for over 3 months (or are deemed to have been in continuous employment for 13 weeks).

6. The right to maternity/paternity leave when we have children.

From April 2003, most mothers are entitled to 26 weeks paid maternity leave and an additional 26 weeks unpaid leave. To get maternity pay, we must earn over £77 per week and have been working for over 6 months by the time the baby is 15 weeks from being due. For the first 6 weeks, this should be 90% of average earnings, then a flat rate of £100 for 20 weeks. If pay can't be claimed, Maternity Allowance may be claimed from the DSS. Fathers/male partners get 2 weeks paid paternity leave (subject to the same qualifying conditions as for maternity).

7. The right to be free from harassment.

We are all entitled to a workplace where there is no racial or sexual harassment, bullying, prejudice or discrimination. Agency and part-time workers have the same rights as full-time workers.

8. The right to defend ourselves.

We all have the right to protection from dismissal for asserting our statutory employment rights. We also have the right to join with our fellow workers and organise ourselves collectively, and to join a trade union.

9. The right to refuse work that is unsafe or where training is not provided.

We all have the right to refuse to work if we find ourselves in imminent danger. Also, laws governing agencies mean they should not send us to jobs for which we are not qualified, and they must ensure that proper training is provided.

:> [Read more about Health and Safety...](#)

Standing Up for Ourselves

Casualisation and so-called flexible working are ways of undermining working conditions and exploiting us more than ever. They also make permanent jobs more vulnerable. So casualisation does not only affect temporary and agency workers, but all workers.

Employers will sack workers they do not like, knowing full well that many are reluctant or unable to go through an employment tribunal. It is not enough having a few statutory and contractual rights at work - we need to stand together to ensure that the rights long fought for are respected.

Only by standing together can we prevent bosses from intimidating and victimising us. We cannot leave it to the Government, the bosses, political parties, or the established trade unions. The most effective way of defending our rights is by organising ourselves and taking collective direct action. By forming our own groups where everyone is equal, we can resist exploitation and enforce our rights at work effectively.

Defending our rights is just the start. Once we achieve this, we can start to take the initiative. An injury to one is an injury to all!

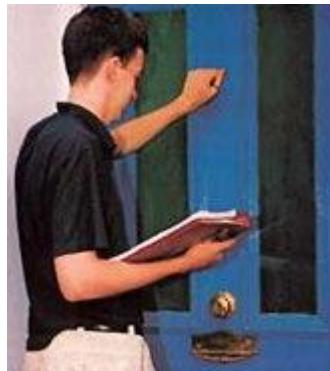
Edited by libcom from a leaflet by the [Solidarity Federation](#).

Community organising



Information, guides and tips on organising around issues which affect you and other people living in your local area.

Door knocking guide



Tips for effectively carrying out door-knocking visits and talking to people in your local area.

In community politics, door knocking plays an essential role. From just getting to know your neighbours better, to carrying out a local survey or trying to sign people up to a local campaign or petition talking to people at home is a valuable exercise, due to its face-to-face nature,

However, it can be a daunting task, so we put together a set of tips to help you on your way, with pre-planning and then how to act on people's doorsteps.

Before you go

- ¶ Never go out on a rainy day, people are put off if you look like a drowned rat or are covered with a hood, hat or umbrella
- ¶ Similarly, avoid going out if you are ill.
- ¶ Dress smartly; not necessarily suited but ironed and clean. Don't look like a burglar or bailiff - people are less likely to answer the door to someone wandering up their drive with a big hood or black hat and scarf...
- ¶ It's best to start organising with your closer neighbours, so you have a basic trust already
- ¶ The best time to go knocking is during daylight hours. It is best not to go around dinner time. Yes people will be home, but they won't be happy to talk. Similarly, don't go just after work, people need at least half an hour to relax before doing anything like talking to strangers.
- ¶ It's always good to have a clip board in you hand - even if you don't really need it, take one with some leaflets on.
- ¶ The resident's first point of eye contact is either your face or the clipboard so always make sure that your group or campaign's header is present and clearly visible on the board.
- ¶ Depending what sort of thing you're doing it could be useful to have two sets of leaflets, one for people who are out or answer the door and tell you they've got no time and a separate one for people who are more interested.
- ¶ If you have enough time it is worth calling back to houses that didn't answer the first time. Just make sure that you keep an accurate record of which houses you spoke to people in or else you'll end up calling on the same person several times and they'll get pissed off.....
- ¶ Bring a sheet to note down the contact details of particularly interested people.
- ¶ Some people have put a card through the doors of the areas to be visited announcing the time they'll be along - if people don't want to talk they can just put the card in the window to indicate they're not interested. While time-consuming this can be worthwhile.
- ¶ If you're leafleting for a 'controversial' issue (e.g. anti-fascist) then start at the top of a tower block, otherwise you may have to walk down past hostile people who might have been alerted by your leaflets.

At the door

- ¶ Say the most important thing first. Avoid apologising for bothering them in the first sentence – people prefer you get to the point of why you're calling.
- ¶ The person opening the door won't want to hear too much complicated stuff in the first minute or so leave aside complicated explanations in favour of making a good first impression
- ¶ If you seem confident and relaxed, so will they - if you're nervous and tense then they will also tend to react defensively.

- ¶ Use inclusive gestures, open stance - never cross arms while you speak, or stand like you are about to leave for example.
- ¶ Don't be intimidating, and don't approach people's doors in groups.
- ¶ Remember to smile; don't go if you're in a bad mood. People always pick up on it.
- ¶ Look people in the eye, use a strong handshake – it makes you seem more trustworthy.
- ¶ Always be honest about what you know and don't know - don't flannel to sound more informed.
- ¶ Know your script, and answers to frequently asked questions, so you don't fumble your words when asked.
- ¶ It sounds silly, but your knocking style is important. If you sound too official, people may not come to the door.
- ¶ Behave from the moment you touch the gate - people often hear it and will check you through the curtains. Close the gate behind you, and don't walk on the grass. Close the gate behind you when you leave as well.

Finally...

You shouldn't be nervous about knocking on people's doors. Most people are very nice even if they're not interested in what you have to say. It helps if you have a leaflet to give people because then you can refer to it, point out the date and venue of a meeting etc. Also if what you're trying to organise is local and for the good of the community then you have an immediate advantage over most people who are door-knocking for other reasons.

Once you've knocked on a few doors and got some feedback it's plain sailing usually, although don't be disappointed if all the people who seemed enthusiastic don't actually turn up to a meeting or event.

Last of all, enjoy it! It's a great buzz when you get into it, and a great way to get to know people in your community.

libcom.org

With tips from the users of libcom.org/forums and the Festival of Dissent, 2005

Key ideas for community organising



Some very broad basic ideas for getting started at organising in your local area.

Firstly, remember: If you are going to do community organising, do it in your own area! Don't be a missionary!

Research and preparation

Look around your local area and determine what issues it faces. Talk to your neighbours, what issues do they think are important regarding the area. Determine what kinds of projects you can develop or direct action you can take that meet the area's needs or address the community's issues.

Find out if others are already working on the problems in their area and if they've been effective and what you can learn from them. Determine what kinds of resources you have available and who in your area might be useful allies in accomplishing your goals.

Volunteering or starting your own group

If there is a group doing work in your area and they are effective, it would be a good idea to volunteer with them to gain experience. If there is no group doing work on the issues you are concerned about or existing groups are not effective, start your own group but try to remain on friendly terms with existing groups.

Planning

Set a goal. Devise objectives (or strategies) to achieve the goal. Devise actions to achieve the objectives.

Community-building projects

Plan everything you do in your area with an effort to bring people in the community together and get them involved. Make a special effort to get people in the area who are not politically conscious to work on projects and become active.

In short, gear your work towards not just helping the community but towards actually strengthening a sense of community.

Fight prejudice as you organise

Make a special effort to ensure that your organisation and its projects reflect the racial, ethnic and gender diversity in the community and make sexual equality and anti-racism explicit parts of your organisation's politics and policies.

Get attention

Be visible in your area, make every effort to let people nearby know you exist. Seek press attention when you do an action, gain a victory, or establish a project.

Demonstrations and law enforcement

Defending living and working conditions has brought many people into conflict with the state itself, and the anti-capitalist demonstrations of the past ten years have turned this into a ritual. We offer guides to taking direct action effectively and safely, avoiding police harassment, and dealing with arrest and incarceration.

Demonstrations guide

Information on and guides to organising and participating in demonstrations, marches, pickets and other similar activities safely and effectively.

Guide to public order situations



A brief survival guide for when a demonstration turns into a riot or public order situation, and preventing the police from gaining the upper hand once a situation has occurred.

This article is focussed on the UK, but some points are universal.

Bear in mind that the police are probably much better equipped and trained for close combat than you or I. They have been psyching themselves up for hours, are likely to have plenty of reserves standing by and usually feel confident with the law behind them. Beating the police is about outwitting them, not necessarily hitting them over the head.

The aims and methods of the state

British Law has traditionally been concerned with keeping the peace and not necessarily preventing or solving crime.

The roots of such public order policing can be traced back to the common law offences introduced to control the havoc caused by mercenaries returning from the Hundred Years War. These laws evolved into the 1967 Riot Act, which established in law the concept of arresting anyone present at a

riot, regardless of whether they are guilty of violent acts. The Riot Act no longer exists, replaced by the Public Order Act in 1986. The reality of the situation is that the police act as if it did.

The Public Order Manual of Tactical Operations and Related Matters provides the police with clear instructions for dealing with situations where public order is threatened. This manual has never been made public, has no legal standing and was never discussed by Parliament. It basically gives the police guidance in the use of pre-emptive acts of violence, to achieve the following:

1. To break the crowd up into manageable portions, keep them moving then eventually disperse them.
2. To provoke violence as a way of justifying their actions and flushing out any ringleaders.
3. To contain the crowd and stop the trouble spreading.
4. To intimidate and break the spirit of the crowd.
5. To gather evidence for later.

The manual contains details of tactics which include the use of snatch squads, baton charges and the use of horses to disperse and intimidate large crowds. Make no mistake - the cops will be prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that our actions and protests are ineffective.

So how do we make sure our actions are effective?

- Don't be tempted to stand around and fight – get to where you can cause disruption without the police around.
- Keep moving, as a group and individually. Fill gaps. Never stand still – chaos puts the police off.
- Nip police attempts to form lines or divide the crowd in the bud.
- Don't be intimidated.
- Do everything in small teams, prepare in advance.
- Think defensively. Protect each other and escape routes.
- Always face outwards, ie. away from us and towards them.
- Link arms as often as possible, form barriers, use your body.
- Move quickly and calmly, never giving the police time to react.

Preparations

Staying out of jail and hospital need not be hard work. Most people caught up in riots manage it. But with a bit of forethought you can turn surviving a public order situation into a living order situation!

The aims of the protestors

No one really 'wins' at the end of the day, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that you are unhurt, still free and some egg is still stuck to the face of your original target after the police have been and gone.

With all that in mind, we suggest you stick to these three basic aims when you find yourself in a riot:

1. Get you and your mates away safely, rather than fighting.
2. Find a place to cause embarrassment and economic damage to your real target, rather than fighting.
3. Help others in trouble by administering first aid and de-arresting, rather than fighting.

Sticking together

Always try to form an affinity group before setting out and at least have a buddy system whereby everybody has one person to look out for, and to act with, when a situation arises.

Affinity groups are just a handful of people who work together as a unit, as and when circumstances arise. They can meet beforehand to discuss ideas and possible reactions, practice or role play scenarios. The more your group meets, the quicker your reaction times will get and your effectiveness will improve. Affinity groups can often act without the need for internal discussion, they naturally develop their own shorthand communications and can divide up skills and equipment amongst each other. Water, D-locks, paint, first aid, food, banners and spare clothes is a lot for one person to carry, but divided up between five people it's nothing.

Do pay attention to what you're going to wear in advance. Consider precautions that are discrete, adaptable, easy to apply and discard. Thinking about these threats in advance will help:

1) Surveillance

Masking makes it difficult to identify individuals in a crowd and if everyone masks up no one will stand out. The cut off sleeve of a long sleeved t-shirt makes a good mask. Wear it casually around your neck. If you wear glasses use a cut off section of a stocking (hold-ups work best as they have thick elastic) instead of a t-shirt, this prevents glasses steaming up. You can use it as a hair-tie, if you're a hippy type, until you need it.

A hooded top will cover most of your face and a baseball cap on its own provides good protection from most static cameras, which are usually mounted high up. Sunglasses give good protection against harmful rays including UV and CCTV. Worth bearing in mind is that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 made an Amendment to Section 60 of The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. It gives any uniformed police officer the power to insist on the removal of any item of clothing a person is wearing or may wear for the purpose of concealment of identity. The item can be seized and retained.

2) Truncheon blows

A placard makes a good temporary shield and light strips of plastic under your clothing or on the forearm could offer some protection. Unless you are intending to try and break police lines, the best protective clothing is probably a good pair of running shoes. More recently, the WOMBLES - inspired by Italy's Ya Basta group - have taken a more positive stance to protection by wearing thick layers of padding under their clothes, together with helmets. This enables them to keep police lines at bay, protecting themselves and the crowd behind them from truncheon blows. They are able to push through police lines and free demonstrators trapped by the use of a Section 60 (see later).

3) CS Spray

The best authorities suggest a solution of camden tablets (used to clean home brewing equipment), some say use lots of water, but its effectiveness is unclear. Whatever you do don't rub it in or take a hot shower. If in doubt get clear and let the wind blow it away from your skin. This will take 20 minutes.

4) Baton charges

If you want to take a banner, use long strips of plastic haulage tarps rather than a sheet. This can be

used as a moveable barrier to stop charging police or for you to advance behind. Wrap the ends in on themselves so the police can't easily grab it. Hide behind and hold on tight.

Defending

If you aren't doing anything else you should always be defending.

Whether that means securing a building, strengthening your position on the street, barricading (see later) or protecting others. Here are some ideas:

1. Keep looking outwards. For example, if someone is being given first aid, stand and face away from them.
2. Form cordons as much as possible. Anything the police want, including buildings and especially sound systems needs a strong outwardly facing cordon. Things may be quiet and you feel like a prick linking arms or holding hands with complete strangers, but do it. Repeat the mantra 'It's not a hippy peacenik thang, it's a rock hard revolutionary thang.' Take a leaf out of the police manual: stand like you're about to do 'the conga' and stick your right hand down the back of the trousers of the person in front, repeat along the line, asking permission first. It's virtually unbreakable.
3. Get into the habit of dancing with your back towards the sound system.
4. Someone needs to watch the police from a good vantage point, so that their next move can be pre-empted. On top of the sounds van is not a good place; no one can hear when you shout "Here come the dog handlers! Fucking run!" and any gestures you do will be interpreted as dancing...
5. Sitting down is good for dissuading the police from charging, but you should only do it in large numbers and the crowd needs to feel confident. We advise you to sit down as soon as the shout goes up, hesitating is not good, you can assess the situation once you're down there. Hopefully others will do the same. If it still looks viable five seconds later, link arms with your neighbours. There are times when sitting down is not really recommended – horses are maybe too unpredictable but the authors have never seen horses charge into a seated crowd, the way they do into a standing crowd. It's a good way to avoid the crowd getting split up. Some particularly violent gangs of police just aren't worth it either. Only experience will teach you when to sit down.
6. Barricades can be more hassle than they are worth. A solid impassable barricade can reduce your own options when you need to run. Bear in mind that anything you build now you are likely to get dragged over later - leave out the barbed wire. The best barricades are random matter strewn all over the place – horses can't easily charge over them, police find it hard to hold a line in among them, but individuals can easily pick their way through. If you know police are advancing from only one direction and you have clear escape routes behind, barricades can be sensible. The tactics the cops developed during the 1980's riots was to drive the van into crowds with TSG [Tactical Support Group] in the back, jump out and arrest everyone they caught. Barricades are an effective way of stopping this.
7. The best form of defence of all is CHAOS! A complicated hierarchy needs orders to act on and those orders come from individuals making informed decisions. If the situation changes constantly they simply cannot keep up. Keep moving all the time, weave in and out of the crowd. Change your

appearance. Open up new directions and possibilities, be unpredictable. If you find yourself stood still and passive for more than a minute then you've stopped acting defensively.

Basic police choreography

With any crowd the police will be looking to break it up as soon as possible. Crowd dispersal is achieved with baton charges, horse charges and sometimes CS gas and vehicles. Some particularly nasty or out of control units may pile straight into the crowd, but there is usually a gap between the time they arrive and the start of the dispersal. This stalling time is often just dithering by the commanding officer, or psyching-tooling up time for the troops (the latter is easy to spot). This aside, there are three more reasons why they aren't wading straight in, see if you can spot them next time you're waiting for 'kick-off':

1. They haven't worked out where they're going to disperse you to.
2. They want to gather more evidence/flush out more ring leaders. This involves keeping you right where they can see you and provoking you like hell. They will film you and photograph you and send out snatch squads to pick off individuals.
3. They are waiting for back up because you out number them or are in danger of gaining the upper hand.

However, since Euston Station, November 30th 1999, the police have been using the tactic of coralling people and preventing them from leaving. Section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 gives police blanket powers to stop and search anyone in a certain area where they 'reasonably suspect' there will be incidents of serious violence. Often this tactic is used to gather information, but you're not obliged to help. They can't read anything of yours (address book, bank cards etc) and you don't have to give a name or address, but they can search you for weapons only. Being held for hours is dispiriting, you can't do much, and the police may push you about and provoke an opportunity to crack a few skulls. This is where the WOMBLES come into their own, you can take a more positive approach and not just wait around until the cops allow to let you leave. The old bill may also detain people to prevent a breach of the peace where they fear one is imminent. The legality of this is questionable, there will most likely be legal challenges in the near future.

The dance steps

OK, so they've stopped fucking around and now it's time to send you home, with a great story to tell your friends (let's face it, they won't see the truth on the news). The bulk of the action is shocking in its predictability. The following will be repeated over and over, in different combinations, until they win or get bored:

1. Officers in lines will pen you in (preferably on the pavement).
2. Officers in lines will push into a crowd to divide it in half.
3. Batons/horses/CS spray attack penned in crowds to lower morale.
4. Charges that slowly push you down a street (rush of cops >> strengthen line > repeat).
5. Crowds throwing missiles will be 'put to flight', as it's harder to throw stuff if you are running.
6. Shift changes. (Often look for the arrival of reinforcements. It is important to try and spot the difference for reasons of morale, and that they are vulnerable during shift changes).

Most of the above require the individual officers to be in tight lines, so it's important to stop those lines forming. Unfortunately we are quite bad at this. The first line drawn is the most crucial and

most people don't see it coming. The police will try and form lines right in amongst you if they can, thus weakening your position at the same time as strengthening theirs.

Line dancing or stopping lines forming

If the crowd seems volatile, the police will hold right back and the first line drawn will be some distance away. But if you are all hanging around looking confused and passive they will sneak right in amongst you and the first lines will be dividing lines. This is how it works:

The first divide the crowd up into 'actors' and 'viewers'. Small groups of officers will move into the crowd and start politely encouraging the timid ones onto the pavement. Once the crowd starts moving the way they want, those little groups of cops will get bigger and start joining up. Before you know it, there's two crowds on two pavements with two lines of cops penning them in. Let the head cracking commence. Or...

- Don't stand and watch them.
- Don't look like you'll let them get anywhere near you.
- Spot gaps in the crowd and fill them.
- Work out which space they want to take and get there with your mates first.
- Get long tarp banners to the front to stop them advancing and filming.
- Protect your escape routes by standing in them.
- Get those who have turned into spectators off the pavements, back in the crowd and moving around.

Of course, now having resisted being split up and penned in, they may just let fly with the baton charge. But at least you're now in a stronger position to deal with it and escape. Whatever happens next, don't just stand there waiting for it. If you've managed to get their line drawn far away, you've bought valuable time and space – so use it! Even if their line is right up against you, they still haven't broken down your numbers.

However, it's only a matter of time before the police try and get closer/break you up again. Use the time to get out of there slowly and in one block, this is the last thing they want – a large mob moving around freely. Whatever you do, don't stand there waiting for them to try again. You are now in control to go and do whatever you want, so do it. If they have blocked your only exit, try...

Counter advancing

This involves moving your lines forward into theirs, thus gaining more space and opening up more exits. Use the front line as a solid wall, linking arms and moving slowly forward. Use the long banner like a snowplough (this stops them grabbing you or breaking the line, they can still hit you with truncheons though). If there's enough of you WOMBLED up, your protective clothing will make that getaway that much safer and easier.

Snow plows

A line of crowd control barriers can also be carried by the front line like a snowplough to break into the police ranks. The front of the 'plough' can then be opened once their line is breached and the barriers pushed to the side to contain the cops. This all needs a lot of co-ordination and balls, the advantage gained will not last long, so push all your ranks forward through the gap straight away.

Using your body

Your body is your best and most adaptable tool. It is best used in concert with others. For instance it could take a long time for twenty to scale a wall, but stand two people against the wall, bowed together with their arms locked and you've got a set of human steps! (Those waiting to climb can link arms around the steps to protect them). Always look for ways to use your body to escape.

Re-forming

Keep looking for ways of increasing your numbers, by joining up with other groups and absorbing stragglers. Everyone has to get out and you'll stand a better chance of getting out unharmed, with all your belongings and equipment if you leave together at the same time.

Snatch squads

When the police want to isolate and arrest an individual in a crowd they will usually employ a snatch squad.

Watch for groups of ten or so fully dressed cops, rallying behind the police lines. They will be instructed by evidence gatherers and a superior (you can often spot them pointing out the person to be snatched). The lines will open temporarily to let the squad through. Half the officers will perform the snatch, the other half will surround them with batons, hitting anyone who gets in the way. Once they have their target he/she is bundled away, back behind police lines.

Try and beat the snatch squad by:

1. Keeping the crowd moving around.
2. Spot the squad preparing.
3. If possible warn the target to get the hell out of the area.
4. Linking arms in an impenetrable wall in the squad's path.
5. Surround the squad once they are in the crowd and intimidate them so much that they panic and give up.
6. If you are being grabbed or pressure pointed, keep your head and arms moving. Don't lash out if you can help it, or you will end up with an assault charge too.

De-arresting

The best time is to do this is as soon as the snatch has happened. You need a group who know how to break grips and some people to act as blockers. Once you've got your person back all link arms and move off into the crowd. The police may try and snatch back or arrest one of the de-arresters.

This guide is an ongoing project. Please send your comments and additions to us for the next version, to 'Public Order Guide' c/o Manchester Earth First! Dept. 29, 255 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 5LW

Edited by libcom.org, last reviewed 2006

Section 60 advice guide



Some information and tips on the law, your rights, and how to react when police have enforced a "Section 60" order on a demonstration or picket.

At some recent demonstrations, police have cordoned off the demonstration, corralling large numbers of people into an increasing confined area before taking their names, addresses and photographs, eventually releasing them one by one. This was done under the obscure Section 60 of the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994 (originally designed to prevent minor football disturbances).

The S60 order is a new police tactic at major demonstrations used effectively to control, subdue and gain personal information about protesters despite having the extraordinarily limited power simply to "Stop and search in anticipation of violence".

Its effectiveness in the past was due to the fact that no-one knew just exactly what powers the police had under S60. As it turns out, they have very few powers.

In the event of an S60 order being issued these are the important things to remember: The police have the power to search you for weapons (and dangerous instruments). They have no other powers under S60. They can only detain you "for as long as necessary to carry out a search".

They have no legal power to force you to give them your name and address. *Under no circumstances give it to them:* it will be kept on file for seven years. When asked, say "no comment".

They have no legal power to force you to have your photograph taken. Do not allow them to do this. This too will be kept on file for seven years. Keep your head turned away, or put your hand in front of your face.

They have no legal power to ask you to remove any item of clothing in public view, other than that which is concealing your identity. Any facial masking can be confiscated.

If you are asked to remove coats/jumpers etc, *refuse outright*. They have no legal power to search wallets, purses, inside small pockets etc. This is an S60 search, for weapons only. If they ask to search wallets, purses, inside small pockets etc, *refuse outright*.

If you have a bag they will search that, but again for weapons only. Any other items, documents, potentially incriminating articles are *off limits*.

Do not allow them to examine any of your personal possessions (cash cards, student cards, diaries, organisers etc). This is not part of S60. Under Article 8 of the UK Human Rights Act 1998 your privacy is assured. Make sure they know this. They can only confiscate weapons and facial masking.

They have the power to use "reasonable force" but ONLY if you do not submit to a search. No other force can be used for any other purpose.

They must tell you their name, number, station they're based at the reason for the search. Ask them for this. Not only will it piss them, off but if they don't provide this information the search will be illegal. Remember: in an S60 situation, you are accused of nothing and you have done nothing wrong. *Do not answer any questions*, however insignificant or polite. *Say "no comment" to everything*.

Most of all, *don't be scared by them!* They know the law, and now so do you. Use it!

Legal advice: Section 60

Contrary to information being circulated, the legal basis of the tactic of police cordoning off demonstrations and forbidding large numbers of people to leave from inside the cordon - as used at J18, N30 and Mayday2K - is NOT s60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Police, indeed anyone, can use reasonable force to detain people to prevent a breach of the peace where they fear one is imminent. This was the basis of the effective mass imprisonment at previous demonstrations. It is not an arrest.

The powers in s60 have been used to search people individually as they are being released from the cordon and this is where the confusion stems from.

S60 can be used where a senior cop reasonably suspects there will be incidents of serious violence or that people are carrying dangerous weapons or offensive weapons in a locality (inserted by s8 Knives Act 1997).

1. Once police have released you from the cordoned area, they can then only detain you "for as long as necessary to carry out a search". While in the cordoned area they can detain you as long as they have reasonable (i.e. objectively justifiable) grounds that this is necessary to prevent a breach of the peace.

2. While performing a search they *can* ask you to remove outer clothing, such as coats and jumpers in public. In addition, s60(4A) - inserted by s25 CDA 1998 - allows the police to force you to remove anything they reasonably suspect you are wearing wholly or mainly to conceal your identity. There is nothing to stop you putting something else on after you have taken off a mask or had it confiscated.

3. The s60 search is for "offensive weapons or dangerous instruments". This is not limited to large things such as samurai swords and stun guns (taking examples from certain Sunday papers) but can include razor blades. They *can* search inside wallets, purses, small pockets for these.

4. They *can* search personal possessions for dangerous instruments that might be hidden inside and they can also seize prohibited articles such as drugs. While it is true that Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) contains a qualified right of respect for your private life, and that under s6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 public authorities such as the police will be acting unlawfully if they breach any right in the ECHR, it is wrong to see this as doing something as absolute as assuring your privacy.

Before police start searching through personal possessions, e.g. address books, cards in wallet, warn them politely that if they do start trying to read what's in your address book or on the cards in your wallet rather than performing a cursory search, i.e. seeing if razor blades fall out onto the ground from your address book, they will be acting outside their powers and you will stop them.

8. Before conducting the search, an officer must take reasonable steps to communicate their name, number, station, etc. They also have to provide you with a written record of the search, which you should ask for. If they can't provide one straight away they must tell you which police station you can get it from. Police dislike form filling and paperwork particularly when it leaves less time to bash anti-capitalists and then fit them up.

9. Under the Data Protection Act, anyone holding personal data relating to other people (this includes video and photographic footage) has to provide copies to those people for £10, as demonstrated by Mark Thomas on C4. If substantial numbers of people on the Mayday demonstration exercise this right, the police will have to spend their resources on finding footage with those individuals on, in order to collate it and send it to them, rather than gathering intelligence and preparing for arrests.

*Taken from the [UHC Collective website](#)
Edited by libcom.org, last reviewed 2006*

Terrorism Act 2000 guide



A quick guide and brief summary of the parts of the British Terrorism Act 2000 of relevance to radical workers.

"Terrorism" is defined very widely and could include what people would normally think of as direct action. It gives the Police very wide powers to stop search and arrest, and limits people's rights - including on arrest. The Act has been (mis-)used extensively against workers - most famously against 82-year-old Walter Wolfgang who heckled Tony Blair and the Labour Party conference in 2005.[1](#)

Terrorism as defined by S1 of the TA 2000

It includes:

The THREAT of action (threat is enough - no actual action needed)-which is designed to influence the government , with the purpose of advancing a political or ideological cause, involving :

- serious damage to property
- interference with or seriously disrupting an electronic system.

This is only part of the definition, and does not include actions which we would normally think of as being defined as terrorism.

All 3 parts must be satisfied to come within the definition - there must be an act or threat (of eg serious damage to property), it must be done to influence the government, and it must be to advance a political or ideological cause.

S33 Cordoned areas

Where the Police are undertaking a "terrorist investigation (preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism- see definition above) they can cordon off an area. Lasts for 14 days, can be extended to max of 28 days.

While an area is cordoned, Police can order people to leave and prohibit access to that area.

S41

Police can arrest at any time anyone they reasonably suspect to be a terrorist (see definition above). Detention can be for up to 48 hours (extension can then be applied for to court) access to a lawyer can be denied and normal PACE rules do not apply.

S43

Police can stop and search to see if a person has anything on them to prove they are a terrorist - must be same sex search.

S44 Stop and search powers

Authorization is given by Assistant Chief Constable and can only be given to prevent acts of terrorism.

It relates to a specified area and can last for up to 28 days.

It can only be used to search for things that could be used for terrorism, BUT Police can search even if they don't have grounds to suspect that people have anything on them of this kind.

They can search pedestrians and anything carried by them, cars, drivers passengers and anything they have with them

Police *can't* ask for removal of any clothing in public except hats shoes jacket/coat and gloves.

Police *can* detain people for as long as is reasonable to search

Police *can* use "reasonable force"

If you are searched under this section you can ask for a written statement from the police to confirm you were stopped, and they must give you one - so that makes it all OK then!

Where an authorisation is given it must be confirmed (or cancelled) by the Secretary of State within 48 hours.

Failing to stop is an offence max sentence 6 months or a fine.

S57 Possession for Terrorist Purposes

It's an offence to possess an "article" ("substance or any other thing") in circumstances which give rise to a reasonable suspicion that it's connected with the preparation of instigation of acts of terrorism. It's enough if it's found in the house you live in - unless you can prove that you didn't know it was there

S58 Collection of information

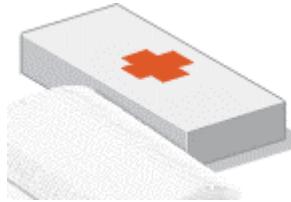
It's an offence to collect or have information likely to be useful to someone preparing an act of terrorism (see S1 definition above). This can include photos or e-mails, unless you can prove that you had a "reasonable excuse" to have it.

Taken from the [UHC Collective website](#)

Edited by libcom.org, last reviewed 2006

- [1.](#) See BBC News: Hero's return for Labour heckler -
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4292342.stm

An activist's guide to basic first aid



A short guide to health care and first aid to be used on demonstrations or during direct action when injuries are possible, such as large pickets, blockades or demonstrations.

Preparation

What to wear

- Comfortable, protective shoes that you can run in.
- Clothing covering all your skin to protect from sun and pepper spray exposure.
- Shatter-resistant eye protection (ie. Sunglasses, swim goggles, or gas mask)
- Bandana to cover nose and mouth soaked in water or vinegar, it can aid breathing during chemical exposure.
- Weather-related gear (ie. Rain gear or sun hat)
- Heavy duty gloves if you plan to handle hot tear gas canisters.
- Fresh clothes in plastic bag (in case yours get contaminated by chemical weapons)
- A cap or a hat to protect from the sun and from chemical weapons.

What to bring

- Lots of water in a plastic bottle with squirt or spray top, to drink and to wash your skin and eyes in need be.
- Energy snacks
- A small medi-kit with bandages, plasters, tape etc.
- Identification and/or emergency contact information ONLY if you want to be cited out of jail in the event of an arrest.
- Just enough money for pay-phone, food, transportation.
- Watch, paper, pen for accurate documentation of events, police brutality, injuries.
- Water or alcohol based sunscreen.
- Inhaler, epipen, insulin or other meds if applicable.
- Several days of prescription medication and doctor's note in case of arrest.
- Menstrual pads, if needed. Avoid using tampons; if you're arrested you may not have a chance to change it (tampons left in for more than six hours increase your risk of developing toxic shock syndrome)

What not to do

- Don't put Vaseline, mineral oil, oil-based sunscreen or moisturisers on skin as they can trap chemicals.
- Don't wear contact lenses, which can trap irritating chemicals underneath.
- Don't wear things that can easily be grabbed (ie. Dangly earrings or other jewellery, ties, loose hair)
- Don't go to the demo alone, if you can help it. It is best to go with an affinity group or some friends

who know you well.

- Don't forget to eat food and DRINK LOTS OF WATER.

Medication in jail

If you are risking arrest and take medication for any health condition that might pose serious problems were your medication to be interrupted (such as: behavioural disorders, HIV, diabetes, hypertension) you should be aware that you may not have access to proper medication while you are in jail. A letter from a doctor will help. Three copies are needed, one for the legal team, one for the medical team, and one for you. It should include your name, diagnosis, that you must have access to medication at all times, a list of all meds required and a statement that you can must be allowed to keep meds on person to administer properly, and that no substitutions are acceptable.

Since your name will be on the document, you may want to hide it on your body as a sort of insurance policy - perhaps you won't need it and then could eat it and participate in jail solidarity tactics, but perhaps you'll be worn out already at the time of arrest and will want to cite out in order to take care of yourself. Better to cite than pass out.

Make sure that your affinity group and the legal team is aware of your needs so they can help care and advocate for you.

Blood, bruises and broken bones

The most common injuries on demonstrations are cuts or bruises sustained either by falling over whilst running or following a kicking from the cops. They are usually minor and treatable 'on site' though some will require hospital treatment.

Bruises require little treatment and it may be the case that you or an injured comrade need simply to rest for a while, whereas cuts should be treated with a plaster or bandage. If bleeding is heavy this can be stopped by firm direct pressure on the source for 5/10 minutes. If an artery has been cut and bleeding is severe, a tourniquet will be needed for short-term management but proper medical attention must be sought if blood loss continues.

Use a scarf, bandana, belt or torn shirt sleeve and tie around the arm or leg directly over the bleeding area and tighten until the bleeding slows. Wrap the injury to protect it and get the hero to a hospital - fast. If someone has glass or metal lodged in their body DO NOT ATTEMPT to remove it: this could cause further injury and increase the risk of infection.

If a limb appears to be broken or fractured, improvise a splint before moving the victim. Place a stiff backing behind the limb and wrap both with a bandage. Try to avoid moving the injured limb. This person needs to go to hospital for an x-ray and treatment.

Head injuries have to be approached with more caution than other body parts. Following a head injury it is essential that the person has an x-ray within 24 hours. Again, bleeding can be stopped by applying direct pressure. If the person is unconscious, do not attempt to move them: this could exacerbate the injuries already sustained: seek professional medical attention.

Internal injuries can occur from blows to the kidneys. These are usually accompanied by nausea, vomiting, shock and persistent abdominal pain. Get prompt professional care.

And finally...

Remember the best protection against injury is our awareness. We must be alert and on guard for possible situations where injury may occur and keep an eye out for our comrades. We have to look after ourselves on actions and we hope that this information has been of help to fellow activists. We welcome feedback and further advice in order to provide ourselves with the best protection whilst out on the front-line of the revolutionary struggle.

Taken from the [UHC Collective website](#)

Edited by libcom.org, last reviewed 2006

Dealing with the police

No comment: The defendant's guide to arrest

A detailed guide on your rights if you are arrested, with advice on what police are likely to do and say, and what you can do to protect yourself.

If you think you might one day run the risk of being arrested, you must find out what to do in that situation. If prison, fines, community service etc. don't appeal to you by following what's written in this article you can massively reduce the risk of all three. In the police station, the cops rely on people's naivety.

Getting arrested is no joke. It's a serious business. All convictions add up: e.g. if you're done three times for shoplifting, you stand a good chance of getting sent down. If there's a chance of you getting nicked, get your act together: know what to do in case you're arrested. Unless you enjoy cells, courtrooms, prisons, you owe it to yourself to wise up.

When you have been arrested

You have to give the police your name and address. You will also be asked for your date of birth - you don't have to give it, but it may delay your release as it is used to run a check on the police national computer. They also have the right to take your fingerprints, photo and non-intimate body samples (a saliva swab, to record your DNA).

These will be kept on file, even if you are not charged.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, removed the traditional 'Right to Silence'. However, all this means is that the police/prosecution can point to your refusal to speak to them, when the case comes to court, and the court may take this as evidence of your guilt. The police cannot force you to speak or make a statement, whatever they may say to you in the station. Refusing to speak cannot be used to convict you by itself. We reckon the best policy if you want to get off is to remain silent. The best place to work out a good defence is afterwards, with your solicitor or witnesses, not under pressure in the hands of the cops. If your refusal to speak comes up in court, we think the best defence is to refuse to speak until your solicitor gets there then get them to agree to your position. You can then say you acted on legal advice.

If you are arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000, the police can keep you in custody for longer. They have already used this against protestors and others to intimidate them. Remember being arrested is not the same as being charged. Keeping silent is still the best thing to do in police custody.

Remember - All charges add up

Q: What happens when I get arrested?

When you are arrested, you will usually be handcuffed, put in a van and taken to a police station. You will be asked your name, address and date of birth. You should be told the reason for your arrest - remember what is said, it may be useful later. Your personal belongings will be taken from you. These are listed on the custody record and usually you will be asked to sign to say that the list is correct. You do not have to sign, but if you do you should sign immediately below the last line, so that the cops can't add something incriminating to the list. You should also refuse to sign for something which isn't yours, or which could be incriminating. You will also be asked if you want a copy of PACE (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act codes of practice) and to sign to say you have refused. We suggest you take a copy – it's the only thing you'll get to read and you might as well get up on the rules the cops are supposed to follow. Your fingerprints, photo and saliva swab will be taken, then you will be placed in a cell until the police are ready to deal with you.

Do not panic!

Q. What if I am under 18?

There has to be an 'appropriate adult' present for the interview. The cops will always want this to be your mum or dad, but you might want to give the name of an older brother or sister or other relative or adult friend (though the cops may not accept a friend). If you don't have anyone, they will get a social worker - this might cause you more problems afterwards.

Q: When can I contact a solicitor?

You should be able to ring a solicitor as soon as you're arrested, once at the police station it is one of the first things you should do, for two reasons:

1. To have someone know where you are.
2. To show the cops you are not going to be a soft target - they may back off a bit.

It is advisable to avoid using the duty solicitor as they may be crap or hand in glove with the cops. It's worth finding the number of a good solicitor in your area and memorising it. The police are wary of decent solicitors. Any good solicitor will provide free advice at the police station. Also, avoid telling your solicitor much about what happened. This can be sorted out later. For the time being, tell them you are refusing to speak. Your solicitor can come into the police station while the police interview you: you should refuse to be interviewed unless your solicitor is present.

: What is an interview?Q

An interview is the police questioning you about the offences they want to charge you with. The interview will take place in an interview room in the police station and should be taped.

An interview is only of benefit to the Police

Remember they want to prosecute you for whatever charge they can stick on you. An interview is a no-win situation. For your benefit, the only thing to be said in an interview is "No comment".

Remember: They can't legally force you to speak.

Beware of attempts to interview you in the cop van or cell etc. as all interviews are nowadays recorded. The cops may try to pretend you confessed before the taped interview. Again say "No comment".

Q: Why do the police want me to answer questions?

If the police think they have enough evidence against you they will not need to interview you. For example, in most public order arrests they rely on witness statements from 1 or 2 cops or bystanders, you won't even be interviewed. Also if they have arrested you and other people, they will try to get you to implicate the others. The police want to convict as many people as possible because:

1. It makes it look like they're doing a good job at solving crime. The clear-up rate is very important to the cops; they have to be seen to be doing their job. The more crimes they get convictions for, the better it looks for them.
2. Police officers want promotion, to climb up the ladder of hierarchy. Coppers get promotion through the number of crimes they 'solve'. No copper wants to be a bobby all their life.

A 'solved crime' is a conviction against somebody. You only have to look at such cases as the Birmingham 6 to understand how far the Police will go to get a conviction. Fitting people up to boost the 'clear-up rate', and at the same time removing people cops don't like, is wide spread in all Police forces.

Q: So if the police want to interview me, it shows I could be in a good position?

Yes - they may not have enough evidence, and hope you'll implicate yourself or other people.

Q: And the way to stay in that position is to refuse to be drawn into a conversation and answer "No comment" to any questions?

Exactly.

Q: But what if the evidence looks like they have got something on me? Wouldn't it be best to explain away the circumstances I was arrested in, so they'll let me go?

The only evidence that matters is the evidence presented in court to the Magistrate or jury. The only place to explain everything is in court; if they've decided to keep you in, no amount of explaining will get you out. If the police have enough evidence, anything you say can only add to this evidence against you. When the cops interview someone, they do all they can to confuse and intimidate you. The questions may not be related to the crime. Their aim is to soften you up, get you chatting. Don't answer a few small talk questions and then clam up when they ask you a question about the crime. It looks worse in court.

To prosecute you, the police must present their evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service. A copy of the evidence is sent to your solicitor. The evidence usually rests on very small points: this is why it's important not to give anything away in custody. They may say your refusal to speak will be used against you in court, but the best place to work out what you want to say is later with your solicitor. If they don't have enough evidence the case will be thrown out or never even get to court. This is why they want you to speak. They need all the evidence they can get. One word could cause you a lot of trouble.

Q: So I've got to keep my mouth shut. What tricks can I expect the police to pull in order to make me talk?

The police try to get people to talk in many devious ways. The following shows some pretty common examples, but remember they may try some other line on you.

These are the things that often catch people out. Don't get caught out.

1. "*Come on now, we know it's you, your mate's in the next cell and he's told us the whole story.*"

If they've got the story, why do they need your confession? Playing co-accused off against each other is a common trick, as you've no way of checking what other people are saying. If you are up to something dodgy with other people, work out a story and stick to it. Don't believe it if they say your co-accused has confessed.

2. "*We know it's not you, but we know you know who's done it. Come on Jane, don't be silly, tell us who did it*"

The cops will use your first name to try and seem as though they're your friends. If you are young they will act in a fatherly/motherly way, etc.

3. "*As soon as we find out what happened you can go*"

Fat chance!

4. "*Look you little bastard, don't fuck us about. We've dealt with some characters; a little runt like you is nothing to us. We know you did it you little shit and you're going to tell us.*"

They're trying to get at you.

5. "*What's a nice kid like you doing messed up in a thing like this?*"

They're still trying to get at you.

6. *We'll keep you in 'til you tell us"*

They have to put you before the magistrate or release you within 36 hours (or 7 days if arrested under the Terrorism Act). Only a magistrate can order you to be held without charge for any longer.

7. "*There is no right to silence anymore. If you don't answer questions the judge will know you're guilty.*"

Refusing to speak cannot be used to convict you by itself. If they had enough evidence they wouldn't be interviewing you.

8. "*You'll be charged with something far more serious if you don't start answering our questions, sonny. You're for the high jump. You're not going to see the light of day for a long time. Start answering our questions 'cos we're getting sick of you.*"

Mental intimidation. They're unlikely to charge you with something serious that won't stick in court. Don't panic.

9. "*You've been nicked under the Terrorism Act, so you've got no rights.*"

More mental intimidation and all the more reason to say "No comment".

10. "*My niece is a bit of a rebel.*"

Yeah right.

11. *"If someone's granny gets mugged tonight it'll be your fault. Stop wasting our time by not talking."*

They're trying to make you feel guilty. Don't fall for it, you didn't ask to be arrested.

12. Mr Nice: *"Hiya, what's it all about then? Sergeant Smith says you're in a bit of trouble. He's a bit wound up with you. You tell me what happened and Smith won't bother you. He's not the best of our officers, he loses his rag every now and again. So what happened?"*

Mr Nice is as devious as Mr Nasty is. He or she will offer you a cuppa, cigarettes, a blanket. It's the softly-softly approach. It's bollocks. *"No comment"*.

13. *"We've been here for half an hour now and you've not said a fucking word.... Look you little cunt some of the CID boys will be down in a minute. They'll have you talking in no time. Talk now or I'll bring them down."*

Keep at it, they're getting desperate. They're about to give up. You've a lot to lose by speaking.

14. *"Your girlfriend's outside. Do you want us to arrest her? We'll soon have her gear off for a strip search. I bet she'll tell us. You're making all this happen by being such a prick. Now talk."*

They pick on your weak spots, family, friends, etc. Cops do sometimes victimise prisoners' families, but mostly they are bluffing.

15. *"You're a fuckin' loony, you! Who'd want you for a mother, you daft bitch? Start talking or your kids are going into care."*

Give your solicitor details of a friend or relative who can look after your kids. The cops don't have the power to take them into care.

16. *"Look, we've tried to contact your solicitor, but we can't get hold of them. It's going to drag on for ages this way. Why don't we get this over with so you can go home."*

Never accept an interview without your solicitor present, a bit more time now may save years later! Don't make a statement even if your solicitor advises you to - a good one won't.

17. *"You're obviously no dummy. I'll tell you what we'll do a deal. You admit to one of the charges, and we'll drop the other two. We'll recommend to the judge that you get a non-custodial sentence, because you've co-operated. How does that sound?"*

They're trying to get you to do a deal. There are no deals to be made with the police. Much as they'd like to, the police don't control the sentence you get.

18. *"We've been round to the address you gave us and the people there say they don't know you. We've checked on the Benefits Agency computer and there's no sign of you. Now come on, tell us who you are. Tell us who you are or you've had it."*

If you're planning to give an address make sure everyone there knows the name you are using and that they are reliable. The cops usually check that you live somewhere by going round.

19. *"Wasting police time is a serious offence."*

You can't be charged for wasting police time for not answering questions.

The cops may rough you up, or use violence to get a confession (true or false) out of you. There are many examples of people being fitted up and physically assaulted until they admitted to things they hadn't done. It's your decision to speak rather than face serious injury. Just remember, what you say

could get you and others sent down for a very long time. However, don't rely on retracting a confession in court - it's hard to back down once you've said something.

In the police station the cops rely on people's naivety. If you are aware of the tricks they play, the chances are they'll give up on you. In these examples we have tried to show how they'll needle you to into speaking. That's why you have to know what to do when you're arrested. The hassle in the cop shop can be bad, but if you are on the ball, you can get off. You have to be prepared.

We've had a lot of experience of the Police and we simply say:

Having said nothing in the police station, you can then look at the evidence and work out your side of the story.

This is how you will get off

1. Keep calm and cool when arrested (remember you are playing with the experts now, on their home ground).
2. Don't get drawn into conversations with the police at any time.
3. Get a solicitor.
4. Never make a statement.
5. If they rough you up, see a doctor immediately after being released. Get a written report of all bruising and marking. Take photos of all injuries. Remember the cops' names and numbers if possible.

Remember: An interview is a no win situation. You are not obliged to speak. If the police want to interview you, it shows you're in a good position... And the only way to stay in that position is to refuse to be drawn into any conversation and answer "No comment" to any questions.

Q: What can I do if one of my friends or family has been arrested?

If someone you know is arrested, there's a lot you can do to help him or her from outside.

1. If you know what name they are using ring the police station (however if you're not sure don't give their real name away). Ask whether they are being held there and on what charges. However, remember that the cops may not tell you the truth.
2. Remove anything from the arrested person's house that the police may find interesting: letters, address books, false ID etc. in case the police raid the place.
3. Take food, cigarettes etc. into the police station for your arrested friend. But don't go in to enquire at the police station to ask about a prisoner if you run the risk of arrest yourself. You'll only get arrested. Don't go alone. The police have been known to lay off a prisoner if they have visible support from outside. It's solidarity that keeps prisoners in good spirits.

Notes on this text

This is the third edition of No Comment. It has been updated and reprinted by former members of the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) in conjunction with the Legal Defence & Monitoring Group (LDMG).

The printed version was funded by the proceeds of a damages award from the Metropolitan Police, who were sued for false arrest and imprisonment and breach of human rights. We are sure that they

will be pleased to know that their funds are being invested in a public information campaign as vital and deserving as this.

Copies can be obtained free by sending a 2nd class stamped SAE to No Comment c/o BM Automatic, London WC1N 3XX or you can download copies from www.ldmg.org.uk

Stop and search guide to your rights



A page of information about police stop and search powers in the UK and your rights when you are stopped and searched.

What is a 'Stop and Search'?

Police officers can stop and talk to you at any time. But they should only search you if they suspect you are carrying:

- Drugs
- Weapons
- Stolen property
- Tools which could be used to commit a crime

Why me?

If you are stopped or searched it doesn't mean you have done something wrong. But a police officer must have a good reason for stopping you and should tell you what this is. You should not be stopped or searched just because of your age, race or the way you dress.

Where can I be stopped and searched?

- In a public place
- Anywhere – if the police believe you have committed a serious crime

If the police think there may be serious violence then they can search everyone in an area for weapons – e.g. near a football ground – without a good reason to search each person.

A police officer can stop a vehicle at any time and ask to see the driver's licence and other documents. If they have good reason to think your car contains stolen goods, drugs or weapons, they could search it – even if you are not there. But the police must leave a notice saying what they

have done. If the search causes damage, you can ask for compensation but only if they didn't find anything to connect you to a crime.

How will they search me?

Before searching you, the police officer must normally tell you:

- Their name
- The station they work at
- Why they are searching you
- What they are looking for

If the officer is not in uniform, they must show you their identity card.

If you are in a public place, you only have to take off:

- Your coat or jacket
- Your gloves

The police can only ask you to take off more than this or anything you wear for religious reasons, such as a face scarf, if they take you somewhere private e.g. a police station or the back of a police van. This does not mean you are being arrested. In this case, the officer who searches you must be of the same sex as you.

What happens next?

The police officer must write down:

- Your name or a description of you
- Why they searched you
- When and where they searched you
- What they were looking for and anything they found
- The name and number of the officer who searched you
- Your ethnic background

The police do not have to write this down if they just stop you and don't search you. The police will ask for your name, address and date of birth. You do not have to give any of this information if you don't want to, unless the police tell you they are reporting you for an offence. If this is the case you could be arrested if you don't tell them.

The police will write down your ethnic group. They may ask you to say what this is. This is just to check they are not stopping and searching people just because of their race or ethnic background.

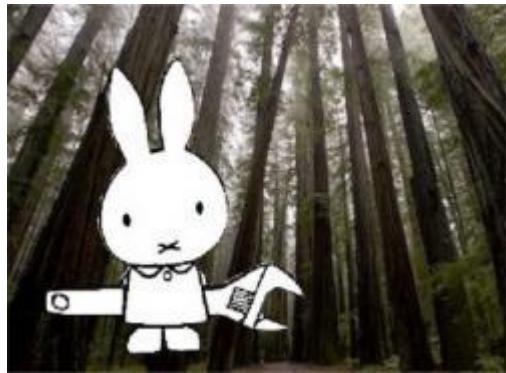
If you don't get a copy of what they wrote down then and there, you can get a copy from the police station within 12 months.

How can I complain?

The police should treat you fairly and with respect. If you are unhappy with how you were treated, you can complain. It will help if you keep a copy of the details that the police wrote down when they searched you. You can get advice from, or complain to:

- A [Citizen's Advice Bureau](#)
- The Commission for Racial Equality
- A solicitor

Miscellaneous direct action guides



Practical advice, tips, guides and resources to help you plan action as part of a variety of campaigns or struggles.

The advice here concerns small group actions whose use may be decided upon by a larger campaign or movement. Due to their nature these types of action are often best undertaken by [affinity groups](#).

Affinity groups



Introductory articles on small-group direct action, with basic tips and information on structures like affinity groups.

Affinity groups: an introduction



For many small group actions an 'affinity group' is the most effective organisational form. This is a page of information about affinity groups, their structure, uses, history and advice.

What is an affinity group?

An affinity group is a small group of 5 to 20 people who work together autonomously on direct actions or other projects. You can form an affinity group with your friends, people from your community, workplace, or organisation.

Affinity groups challenge top-down decision-making and organising, and empower those involved to take creative direct action. Affinity groups allow people to "be" the action they want to see by giving complete freedom and decision-making power to the affinity group. Affinity groups by nature are decentralised and non-hierarchical, two important principles of anarchist organising and action. The affinity group model was first used by anarchists in Spain in the late 19th and early 20th century, and was re-introduced to radical direct action by anti-nuclear activists during the 1970s, who used decentralised non-violent direct action to blockade roads, occupy spaces and disrupt "business as usual" for the nuclear and war makers of the US. Affinity groups have a long and interesting past, owing much to the anarchists and workers of Spain and the anarchists and radicals today who use affinity groups, non-hierarchical structures, and consensus decision making in direct action and organising.

Affinity group roles [in a demonstration]

There are many roles that one could possibly fill. These roles include:

Medical - An affinity group may want to have someone who is a trained street medic who can deal with any medical or health issues during the action.

Legal observer - If there are not already legal observers for an action, it may be important to have people not involved in the action taking notes on police conduct and possible violations of activists rights.

Media - If you are doing an action which plans to draw media, a person in the affinity group could be empowered to talk to the media and act as a spokesperson.

Action Elf/Vibes-watcher - This is someone who would help out with the general wellness of the group: water, massages, and encouragement through starting a song or cheer. This is not a role is necessary, but may be particularly helpful in day long actions where people might get tired or irritable as the day wears on.

Traffic - If it is a moving affinity group, it may be necessary to have people who are empowered to stop cars at intersections and in general watch out for the safety of people on the streets from cars and other vehicles.

Arrest-able members - This depends on what kind of direct action you are doing. Some actions may require a certain number of people willing to get arrested, or some parts of an action may need a minimum number of arrest-ables. Either way, it is important to know who is doing the action and plans on getting arrested.

Jail support - Again, this is only if you have an affinity group who has people getting arrested. This person has all the arrestees contact information and will go to the jail, talk to and work with lawyers, keep track of who got arrested etc.

Affinity groups are not just useful within a protest or direct action setting, this form of organisation can be used for a wide variety of purposes as the history of affinity groups below illustrates.

History of affinity groups

The idea of affinity groups comes out of the anarchist and workers movement that was created in the late 19th century and fought fascism in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Anarchist movement provides an exhilarating example of a movement, and the actual possibility of a society based on decentralised organisation, direct democracy and the principles behind them.

Small circles of good friends, called "tertulias" would meet at cafes to discuss ideas and plan actions. In 1888, a period of intense class conflict in Europe and of local insurrection and struggle in Spain, the Anarchist Organisation of the Spanish Region made this traditional form (tertulias) the basis of its organisation.

Decades later, the Iberian Anarchist Federation, which contained 50,000 activists, organised into affinity groups and confederated into local, regional, and national councils. Wherever several FAI affinity groups existed, they formed a local federation. Local federations were coordinated by committees made up of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. Mandated delegates were sent from local federations to regional committees and finally to the Peninsular Committee. Affinity groups remained autonomous as they carried out education, organised and supported local struggles. The intimacy of the groups made police infiltration difficult.

The idea of large-scale affinity group based organisation was planted in the United States on April 30, 1977 when 2,500 people, organised into affinity groups, occupied the Seabrook, New Hampshire nuclear power plant. The growing anti-nuclear power and disarmament movements adopted this mode, and used it in many successful actions throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Since then, it has been used by the Central America solidarity movement, lesbian/gay liberation movement, Earth First! and earth liberation movement, and many others.

Most recently, affinity groups have been used in the mass actions in Seattle for the WTO and Washington DC for the IMF and World Bank, as well as Philadelphia and Los Angles around the Republican and Democratic National Conventions.

What is a 'cluster' and a 'spokescouncil'?

A cluster is a grouping of affinity groups that come together to work on a certain task or part of a larger action. Thus, a cluster might be responsible for blockading an area, organising one day of a multi-day action, or putting together and performing a mass street theater performance. Clusters could be organised around where affinity groups are from (example: Texas cluster), an issue or identity (examples: student cluster or anti-sweatshop cluster), or action interest (examples: street theater or [black bloc]).

A spokescouncil is the larger organising structure used in the affinity group model to coordinate a mass action. Each affinity group (or cluster) empowers a spoke (representative)

to go to a spokescouncil meeting to decide on important issues for the action. For instance, affinity groups need to decide on a legal/jail strategy, possible tactical issues, meeting places, and many other logistics. A spokescouncil does not take away an individual affinity group's autonomy within an action; affinity groups make their own decisions about what they want to do on the streets.

How to start an affinity group

An affinity group could be a relationship among people that lasts for years among a group of friends and activists, or it could be a week long relationship based around a single action. Either way, it is important to join an affinity group that is best suited to you and your interests.

If you are forming an affinity group in your city or town, find friends or fellow activists who have similar issue interests, and thus would want to go to similar actions. Also, look for people who would be willing to use similar tactics - if you want to do relatively high risk lockdowns, someone who does not want to be in that situation may not want to be in the affinity group. That person could do media or medic work, but it may not be best if they are completely uncomfortable around certain tactics of direct action.

If you are looking to join an affinity group at a mass action, first find out what affinity groups open to new members and which ones are closed. For many people, affinity groups are based on trusting relationships based around years of friendship and work, thus they might not want people they don't know in their affinity group. Once you find which affinity groups are open, look for ones that have an issue interest or action tactic that you are drawn to.

What can an affinity group do?

Anything! They can be used for mass or smaller scale actions. Affinity groups can be used to drop a banner, blockade a road, provide back-up for other affinity groups, do street theater, block traffic riding bikes, organise a tree sit, [confront the police, strategic property destruction], change the message on a massive billboard, play music in a radical marching band or sing in a revolutionary choir, etc. There can even be affinity groups who take on certain tasks in an action. For instance, there could be a roving affinity group made up of street medics, or an affinity group who brings food and water to people on the streets.

What makes affinity groups so effective for actions is that they can remain creative and independent and plan out their own action without an organisation or person dictating to them what can and can't be done. Thus, there are an endless amount of possibilities for what affinity groups can do. Be creative and remember: direct action gets the goods!

This text was taken and edited from [Anarchism in Action by Shawn Ewald](#)

Edited by libcom.org. Last reviewed 2006

Small group direct action advice

This article explains some of the things to think about when planning an action. It's been written for smaller affinity group actions, rather than for mass street mobilisations. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide that has to be strictly followed, but more a list of things that might need to be sorted out for an action to happen successfully.

Pre-action

Aims and activity

What would you like the action to achieve? It may be education and agitation, economic damage, physical disruption, solidarity with others in struggle, or elements of all of these and more. It is best to clarify which is your priority. This helps identify the activity needed to achieve your aims.

You may decide on a banner drop, GM crop trashing, machine sabotage, office or site occupation, leafletting, propaganda production or something else completely.

Target

You may have a target in mind already. If so, think through whether it is possible to achieve the aims wanted with the activity you've decided upon.

When you have an idea of the aims, activity and target you have an outline plan. That is - you know what you want to achieve, and will do so by taking a certain type of action on a specific target.

When you have this you can move onto the first reconnaissance (recce) for the action.

Primary recce

Even if the action is to be done at night it may be best to make this first recce a daylight one. Use it for gathering 'hard information'. Get maps, photographs and plans of the target and the surrounding area. Look for likely drop off points for people, entrance and exit points from the target as well as escape routes. Also look for places for the driver to park up away from the target, or circular routes that could be driven whilst the action takes place.

Primary plan

After the first recce sit down with your fellow planners in a secure location and work out a basic plan. This should include a route to the target that is free of CCTV, a drop off or park up point, entrance point/s into the target, exit point/s and escape route/s.

It should be decided when the action will take place, what time of day or night, roughly how long each part will take (getting to the drop off point, drop off point to target, doing the action, re-grouping, getting back to the pick up point and getting away) and how many people will be needed. The plan should also include where the vehicle will be left/taken and possible routes there.

The plan should also involve communications. This includes who might need to communicate with who and how on the action. This might be between drivers and the people they have dropped off, lookouts and people on the action or a radio scanner monitor and everybody else.

Secondary recce

If the action is going to be at night make this second recce at night as well so as to familiarise yourself with the area in the dark. It may be possible to do both recces on the same day, and then have time for planning the action afterwards.

On this second recce look at the target in more depth. Pay particular attention to any security systems. Actually time the different stages of the action. Think about what tools you will need to do the job and what you will do with them afterwards. Check out the approach and escape routes in more detail, and also the vehicle park up/driving route for during the action. They should all be CCTV-free and there should be alternatives in case of unpredictable circumstances such as cops, roadworks or other people parked up.

Check that the drop off and pick up points are away from buildings and lights, and there is space to turn a vehicle around. If the pick-up point is quite away from the target you may need to decide on a re-group point near the target so everyone leaves together.

Decide what communications equipment you will need and test that it works in the area. Think about the likelihood of carrying away evidence on your clothes and look for places on the getaway route for dumping clothes and perhaps tools. Look for possible regroup points (perhaps a mile or so away) where people could meet up if the action goes wrong and everyone has to scatter.

Detailed action plan

This plan should fill out the basic plan with all the rest of the information needed to carry out the action. It should go from the point people meet to go on the action to the point people disperse at the end. It needs to include precise timings, which routes will be taken, what will be happening at each stage of the action, who will be communicating with who, what tools and other equipment will be needed, what will happen to the vehicle, and what roles need to be filled, e.g. driver, navigator, spotters etc.

The plan should also identify places to dump incriminating evidence as well as regroup point/s. If possible try and arrange to have a trusted person on the end of a phone, well away from the area the action is taking place in, who can be called in an emergency. It might be helpful if they had a large detailed map of the area to direct you if you ring up and are lost. Use a secure mobile for this rather than a landline.

Back up plans

The back up plan/s should be done in the same way as the main action plan. Back ups could be alternative actions to do at the target selected, or new targets entirely.

Consideration should be given to the conditions in which the initial plan will be abandoned and how the decision to revert to a back up plan will be made and communicated to others.

Running through the plans

If possible everyone going on the action should be involved in talking through the plan and making any changes needed. Roles identified should be filled so everyone knows who is doing what. Decisions should be made about what to take (see box on 'Checklist for Recces/Actions') and it should be established who is going to acquire the different items and bring them to the meeting point for the action. Everyone should make sure they have any mobile phone numbers or radio channels being used on the action. This is the point to identify any new skills the group will need to use and arrange to practice them in a 'neutral' setting rather than in the middle of an action.

Finally, people should decide how to organise themselves on the action. You could pair off in buddies or split into smaller groups. Doing this makes it easier to look after one another, move quickly and know if anyone is missing. Make sure everybody knows the names and addresses they will be using if arrested.

Action

Before going to the meeting point for the action, run through the checklist of what you will need and give yourself time to get it all together. Be on time to meet up so people aren't left suspiciously hanging around. It may be best to meet up at a neutral place rather than somebody's house or the centre of town.

Once on the way to the action, make sure everyone is clear about what they are doing. Try not to stop on the way unless you really have to, and remember that if you do have to stop most petrol stations and town centres have CCTV. All being well, you'll arrive at your destination without incident. Put any disguises, such as hoods, masks or gloves, on at the last moment, as if you get pulled by the cops it's good to look straight.

If the action is taking place at night it's best not to use torches or internal car lights for around 20 minutes before you get dropped off. This allows your eyes to become accustomed to the dark.

Once the action starts try to keep focussed on what you are doing, but aware of where others are and what is going on around you. It's important to follow the communication structures you have decided on, e.g. making sure you are in earshot/sight of each other if you need to pass a message on/check everyone is there. Everyone should have a watch that has been

synchronised beforehand, so at the designated finishing time for the action people know to re-group and get ready to leave. If there is no finish time maybe have an easily identifiable signal.

Get together at the re-group point and check everybody is there and okay. This is easier to do if everybody has teamed up into buddy pairs before the action and then sticks together and keeps an eye on each other. If people are missing try and find out what has happened to them. Depending on the type of action and what happened this may be a point where you want to destroy any incriminating evidence.

If the action doesn't go according to plan and people are forced to scatter, try to stay with your buddy or group, move fast and keep in mind the direction you are going. If it's taking place at night you can very easily get disorientated and lost, so before the action have a look at the map and get a clear idea of what direction and where you could head to if this happens.

The most important thing is to not panic. Remember that many people have got out of the most pear-shaped situations by having a clear head and a grim determination not to be caught!

If it's possible get to the pre-arranged meeting point. If that's not an option get out of the area as quickly as you can, and ring the emergency mobile as soon as it is safe to do so so people know you're okay.

Post-action

Debrief

Try and have a meeting of all those that were on the action to discuss how the planning and execution of it went. Think about what was good and bad and try and learn lessons for the next action. This is best done in the first few days after before memories get fuzzy and important details are forgotten.

Mutual aid

Look after yourself and one another. Don't pressure people to go on actions if they are tired or stressed out. Take time out to relax and don't get into 'the struggle is my life' martyrdom headspace. Address problems and power relations within the group. In the longer term make an effort to learn skills that only one or two people have. This stops them being put under unnecessary pressure, and ensures a balance of responsibility.

Security

Don't let your security slacken because the action is in the past. The cops have longer memories than we do and if your action is considered serious by the state an investigation into it can continue for months - or even years.

Political understanding

Analyse the tactical and strategic impact of your actions. Are there better targets or ways of operating? Read our history and learn from current and past struggles, movements and groups.

Communication

It is sometimes useful to communicate to other people what you have done. Maybe write a short article reporting the action for SchNEWS, Earth First! Action Update and other newsletters. Consider issuing an anonymous press release/communiqué to other media. These could be done through an anonymous web based email service set up for this purpose and then only used once. Maybe produce flyposters or stickers about the action and put them up around your local area and send them to other groups. If useful lessons were learnt from the action let other people know by writing a leaflet, discussion document or article.

Broadening the struggle

Help facilitate other people's involvement in the resistance. If you have a closed cell/group help interested people set up another group. If you work in an open group let people know what you are doing and how they can get involved. Doing stalls and printing leaflets with your contact details on are two ways of doing this. Continue with your own activity!.

Taken and edited by libcom from [Do or Die](#)

Blockading: a guide



Some campaigns will require a geographical space to be protected. This is a short guide with tips and advice on some ways you can use your bodies and other materials to barricade, blockade and defend territory.

This area could be houses set for eviction, a large workplace being picketed, a forest, an endangered eco-system, an area through which an environmentally destructive road is to be built...

Also included are tips on protecting trees

Tools for the Job

Direct action is an evolving art form - "necessity breeds ingenuity". Remember that the enemy have avidly read this and every other similar guide, and will be constantly devising methods to beat the "tools" described - so you must innovate, improve and invent. Your imagination is the limit! Various different methods of obstruction can be used in combination. Here are some ideas used now.

Locks

Padlocks and chains

put on gates cause confusion and may hold up work, while they run around looking for the keys and then bolt croppers. Superglue or liquid metal in their padlocks means that they have to cut off their own locks and keep buying new ones.

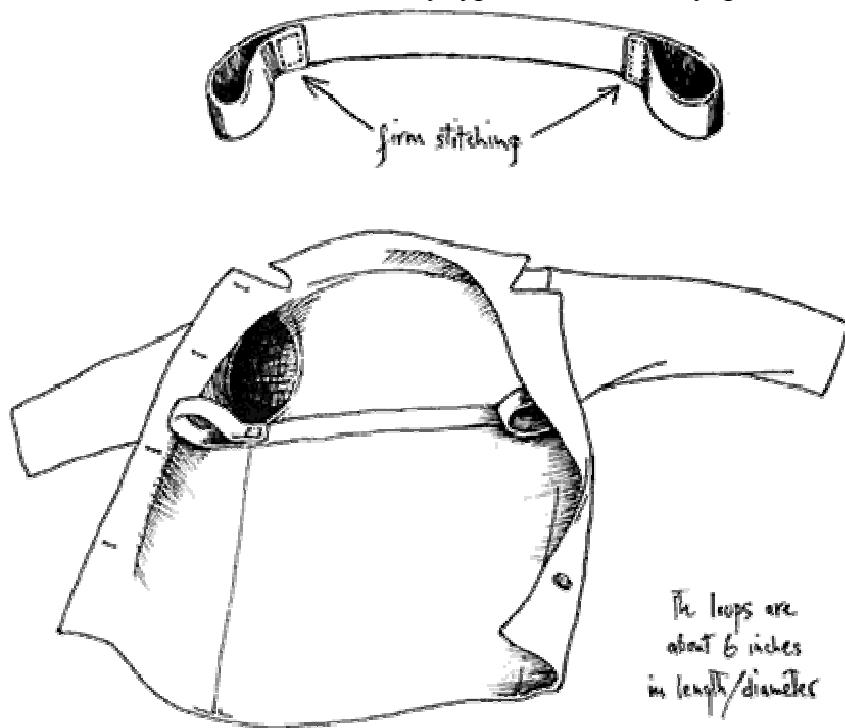
are a classic direct action tool. Get them from bike shops - the more you pay, the stronger they are. They fit neatly around pieces of machinery, gates and your neck. It is worth working in pairs when trying to lock on. The person to lock on carries the U shaped section, and loops it around both a suitable fixed piece of machine and their neck. Then their "buddy", carrying lock barrel and key, secures the lock, and hides, or runs off with the key. If locking on to a machine, someone must let the driver know that operating it will break someone's neck. If

locking on, you may be there for some time, so choose your point carefully. They may remove any blankets or seats you have, and isolate you from other protesters, sometimes forming a screen around you.

You may want to keep a spare key about your person but they may search you for it. If the buddy stays (with key) within earshot, then you can be released in an emergency. It is important that anything you lock onto cannot be removed or unscrewed. Gates can be removed from their hinges, so consider securing the hinge side as well as the opening side. Most contractors have their own hydraulic bolt croppers, which cut the strongest lock in seconds. The lock gives a frightening jolt when cut, so don't lock on if you have a neck injury. Locks are most effective on targets remote from croppers.

Handcuffs

are particularly good underneath machines if you can find inaccessible bits to lock yourself to. They have also been used in tree evictions to attempt to "capture" bailiffs. Loops of strong cord or tape can often be just as effective and are cheaper. Decent handcuffs are difficult to find. Army surplus or "sex shops" sometimes sell weak but expensive ones. Most handcuffs can be undone with a standard key type, which security, police and bailiffs often carry.



Thumb cuffs

(from army surplus shops) are quite good, pocket-sized and tricky to get off. However, some would argue that contractors may take less care if it is just your thumb locked on. Try to get double-locking ones which won't keep tightening.

Coat loop lock-ons

These are effective, low tech and cheap. They work by you wrapping your arms around something e.g. a tree or a vehicle axle, and then putting your wrists through loops sewn into your coat lining, under your armpits - right wrist to left armpit and vice versa. Coat loop lock-ons are inconspicuous and mean you are always ready for action! Sew about a metre of strong, tough material - old seat belts and climbing tape - into your coat horizontally across the shoulder blades up to the armholes. Then double back the excess and sew the ends very firmly into place to form loops. The bigger the loops, the easier they are to find in a panicky

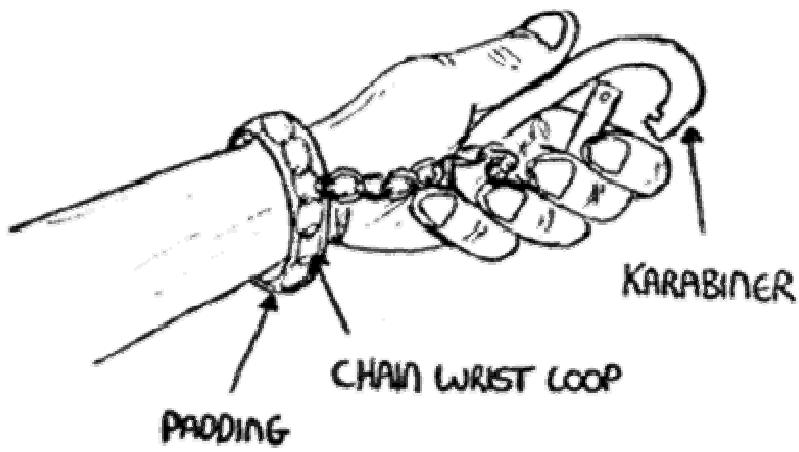
situation. The smaller they are, the harder it is for them to pull your hands out (although you can twist the loops round and round so they tighten around your wrists). Practice with them.

It works as the tape goes around your shoulder blades directing the pressure around your back rather than on the coat. The loops are very difficult to get to, being under your garments and under your armpits. They may rip or cut your coat to get to them, so use an old coat.

Cherry-Picker Catchers

It would be lovely to see a "cherry-picker" hydraulic platform locked to a tree or building during an eviction. To make a cherry-picker catcher you will need several metres of strong chain or steel cable that can't be cut by manual bolt croppers. The length will depend on the height and method of attachment. The basic idea is to firmly attach one end to a tree or building and then, during eviction, quickly lock the other end through the cherry-picker basket. You will need to surprise and distract the bailiffs.

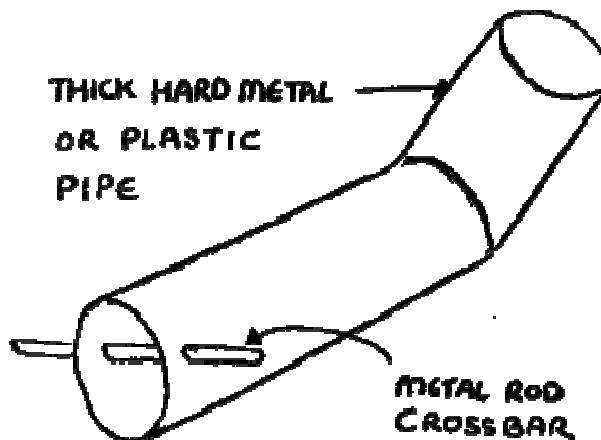
Cable will require a loop at each end, secured with U-bolts with screw threads mangled, so that they can't be undone. Get the best D-lock you can afford and use it either to directly lock the end to the cherry-picker, or loop the cable or chain around part of the bucket, locking it back to itself. They shouldn't be able to cut this unless they start to carry expensive hydraulic bolt croppers in every cherry-picker. If they do, throw them to the floor. If they send another cherry-picker up to rescue the first, catch that too!



Arm Tubes

Tubes made from plastic or metal piping, the diameter of a clothed arm, are a versatile tool. They need to be the length of two arms, ideally with a strong metal pin welded in the middle. Pairs of people with two tubes can defend a small tree or immobilise a machine. You need to link your arms together inside the tubes, either with handcuffs, or loops of strong cord or climbing tape with karabiners, encircling the object. Be aware that if you lock-on with handcuffs, you won't be able to release yourself.

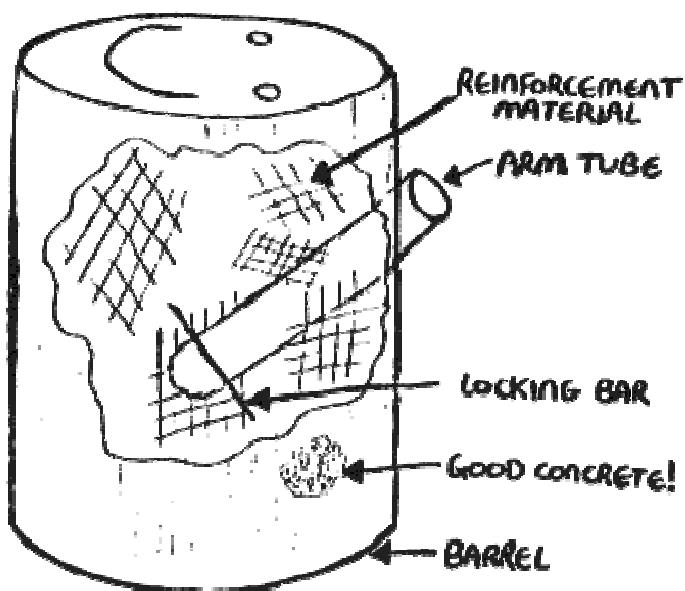
A shorter tube can be used by one person around a digger arm or prop-shaft for example. For comfort, pad the top of the tube, and keep your arm lower than your heart to maintain blood flow. The number of people in arm tubes determines how large an object you can encircle. If you lie down as a group of say ten people (i.e. 10 tubes) with your feet in the centre of a circle, quite a large area can be covered. Arm tubes have been used to blockade gateways, roads and even airport runways. To remove you, they must cut the tube using hacksaws or angle grinders. Once one tube is cut then the whole circle is broken.



Lock-Ons

Concrete lock-ons, also called "dragons", are an advancing technology. Set in chimney stacks, in houses, up trees, at the base of trees, in oil barrels, in roads, in cars (immobilised or still drivable) and in tunnels, they have delayed evictions by days. Mobile lock-ons pose a real threat to free flowing infrastructure systems...

All lock-ons are constructed from an arm tube, with a metal crossbar at the bottom, which is then set in concrete. The concrete mix, 1 part cement to 3 parts sandy aggregate, can be strengthened using washing up liquid. Pieces of chopped-up tyres and metal mesh can be added to the mix to hinder drilling out the concrete. Surround the cross bar and arm tube with lots of metal, e.g. a car wheel. The concrete ideally needs months to set to its full strength. Make them well in advance. On some campaigns, gas canisters have been conspicuously embedded in the lock-on, to deter use of power tools. This has led to the police threatening arrest for explosives offences, so those lock-ons were dismantled by protesters. When building, plan for a comfortable locking on position.



If you're making lots of lock-ons over a large area in a short time, a mobile concreting team with a small mixer might be a sensible way to organise. Ideally, the person who makes the lock-on should be the person who uses it. Try to keep the location of lock-ons quiet and perhaps have one show-piece lock-on to demonstrate to new people.

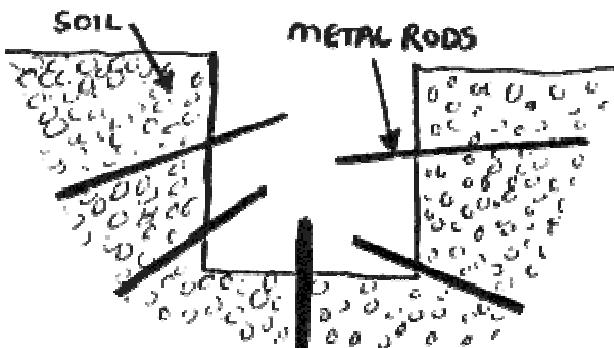
To lock-on, put your arm down the arm-tube and use climbing tape (perhaps reinforced with wire) plus a karabiner, or anything strong and comfortable which can join your arm to the

cross bar. The bailiffs will remove you if they can without actually cracking the lock-on. They often stick a hooked blade on a pole down the tube, to cut any cord or tape attaching you to the lock-on. Fibre-optic remote scopes have been used to see what your arm is attached with. Padding the arm-tube with foam, fabric, cardboard etc, can hinder this. Of course they may tickle you, use threats and intimidation or inflict pain using pressure points or twisting your arm until you unlock yourself. If you are up a tree, they may light fires underneath you to smoke you out.

If they can't get your arm out, they will firstly use an angle-grinder or similar to cut through any outer barrel or other metal coating, then use small pneumatic drills to get through the concrete. They will then need to cut through the arm tube - probably using an angle-grinder. Try surrounding the arm tube with several concentric tubes of increasing diameter, with the spaces filled with concrete to slow their progress further. All this should take quite a while, and will be noisy, dusty and scary. Have your own goggles, ear plugs and dust mask. Prepare for a long stay with food, water and warm clothes. Lock-on at the very last moment as it can be uncomfortable, and go to the loo first!

Ground lock-ons

Dig a hole and drive metal rods halfway into the surrounding soil from the hole before pouring the concrete in. Use one of the rods as the cross bar for the arm tube. Ground lock-ons are best positioned on access routes and at the base of trees. If you can build it amongst the tree's roots, this will reduce the area they have to work in.



Multiple arm tubes are more sociable and restrict access to the lock-on, due to the number of people lying around. Try placing something over a lock-on, leaving enough room to get your arm to it. Cattle-grids, steel plates, lorry wheels and dead cars have all been used. To make it even harder, weld the object to the lock-on.

Alternatively you could build a scaffold / steel bar sculpture, embedded in concrete, leaving only enough room in between to lock-on. You could use rotating bars for this sculpture. Place metal bars inside scaffold poles, packed with grease and ball bearings. Weld the ends to seal them. The rod will spin inside the pole if they try to cut it with an angle grinder. These bars could also be embedded in a lock-on. Ground lock-ons in the bottom of a deep, narrow shaft should force them to dig down to you before they can attack the lock-on. Lock on with your feet. One lock-on has been made with ski-boots!

Tree lock-ons

Find a sturdy fork in a strong tree. You may need to build a small platform as a base. Then build the lock-on up the tree, hauling cement up a bucket at a time. Make it big, or they'll lower you still attached to it. They may chip some of it away, then lower it. Try and place it somewhere awkward.

Felled tree lock-ons

With this method, each felled tree returns to haunt them! If doing a single lock-on, drill a hole the diameter of your arm and a forearm's length into the thickest part of a felled trunk. To make the hole use a large auger or a chainsaw (very carefully). Remove the bark gently and use it to conceal the finished work. Get a steel eye with a strong screw thread on it, e.g. a gate hinge eye, and screw it into the bottom. Lock onto this.

Alternatively, you could drill all the way through so that two people can lock their wrists together, in the middle from either side. Reinforce the trunk by hammering nails and bits of metal around the lock-on. Smaller logs can be used as a mobile road blocking lock-on.

Some suggest that similar lock-ons in living trees would be effective and wouldn't kill the tree, but this is very controversial and likely to upset a lot of people.

Tripods

Tripods have successfully been used as a mobile, easily-erected blockade. They are made from easily obtainable materials - scaffold poles from building sites, or long, straight tree trunks (use their work against them!). Sustained tripod sits in conspicuous places near major roads are a good campaign advert and focal point.

Read our detailed guide to making and using tripods

If you have rope or short scaffold poles fixed about 5 foot from the top of the tripod, they won't be able to lower the tripod by pulling its legs apart. At Newbury in 1996, security guards used a LandRover with a roof rack, which they reversed in under the tripod apex. They stood on the roof and pulled down the sitter, after cutting any handcuffs or locks. It may be worth working on LandRover-proofing; for instance, positioning the tripod so they can't drive under it, or overlapping the legs of several tripods for mutual protection. Cherry-pickers have also been used.

Bipods

These haven't been used in Britain, but have successfully blocked logging roads in the US and Australia. They generally need careful assembly in advance.

A bipod can be incorporated between two tripods, linked with a rope or further poles via the apex of each structure. The stability of the bipod depends entirely on its link to the two tripods. This method defends a larger area than separate tripods.

Monopoles

These haven't been used much. They can be dug vertically into the ground and shinned up to create an obstacle. Alternatively, you could perch them at bizarre angles, fixing one end, to form a cantilever, and dangle from the free end! There are lots of variations on this basic technique. All look fairly dangerous.

Scrap cars

You can buy these very cheaply, and register them with a false name and address. Be aware that driving an unroadworthy, uninsured, untaxed car will get you arrested if you're stopped. You can use scrap cars to quickly blockade a gate, road, motorway, or just about anything. Lock-ons can be built into the car to make them an even more potent tool, or you can just lock onto the chassis. To start the blockade, quickly immobilise the car by slashing tyres, removing wheels, or turning it over.

Caltrops

These are nasty, small, multi-spiked metal objects, designed so that they always lie with a point upwards. They puncture the tyres of any vehicle which drives over them, and so can be placed on access roads or tossed under the wheels. They should only be used on a slow-

moving or stationary vehicle. There are many problems with caltrops. They are dangerous to drivers if used on a fast-moving vehicle, and to people and animals if trodden on. If you are caught using or even carrying them, you are likely to be arrested for possession of an offensive weapon, or perhaps something more serious. Because they look menacing, the police will happily use them to discredit your campaign by calling them "weapons". They are not even a particularly reliable vehicle-stopper, as a tyre can miss them. Therefore, we advise thinking very carefully before using caltrops at all.

Smoke bombs

Reliable smoke distress signals can be bought at boat jumbles for about £4. (see a copy of Practical Boat Owner magazine). They billow out loads of thick coloured smoke, and will float on water. Smaller, cheaper versions can be bought at paintball shops. Set them off upwind, to hinder an eviction, cover an action, escape, or provide a diversion. Don't get caught with one, as the police don't like them.

Anti-quickcuff gauntlets

Quickcuffs and handcuffs may be used by police, bailiffs and climbers to catch you during evictions. To prevent this, try this simple and effective idea. Cut a cardboard strip about 20 cm x 60 cm. Wrap this quite tightly around your wrist and forearm, and tape it to form a tapering cylinder. Then cut a hole for your thumb, so that you can hold onto the gauntlet if anyone tries to pull it off.

Protecting trees

For protecting trees, in addition to blockades you can use weapons against chainsaws. If you are unable to remove or sabotage chainsaws or their fuel from the developers, you'll need special tools to stop them.

Chainsaw whips

These are made from frayed synthetic rope or fabric. If flicked at the chainsaw blade, the whip will catch in the saw teeth, and be dragged into the drive mechanism. Make sure you let go! The synthetic fibres clog up the drive mechanism and may melt into it. Note which direction the saw teeth are moving, so that you whip the correct side.

Gunk bombs

Fine grain sand, mixed with wallpaper paste and short lengths of fishing line, can be used to stuff condoms or balloons. Throw these at chainsaw blades. The mixture needs to be viscous so that it sticks to the blade when it hits.

Tree-bark gunking

Try coating the tree at chainsaw level with sticky biodegradable gunk, such as molasses. You can embed sand, kevlar pieces (from tree surgeons' protective trousers) and pieces of wire into the gunk.

Invasive tree defence

Invasive techniques may cause some damage to trees. Iron does not kill trees, but copper or brass will poison it.

The safest, and arguably most useful, invasive technique is to wrap the tree in frayed polyprop covered in stapled-down chicken wire and metal cable, nailed down corrugated iron and other bits of metal, bitumen, etc. Please remove it if you win!

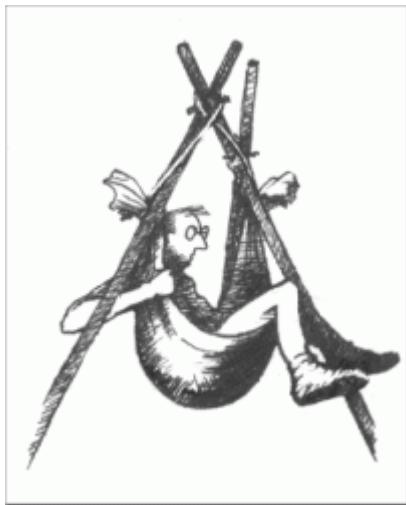
Spiking involves driving large nails or similar deep into the tree. Chainsaw operators might be injured if their saw unexpectedly hits a spike within a tree, and "kicks back". Therefore you must have permanent warning signs, and you should also make the spiking blatantly obvious. The chainsaw operators will then have to carefully and slowly remove all metal before starting work. They may use metal detectors for this, so make sure they know if you're

using non-metal spikes (eg. ceramic or plastic). Be very, very conscientious and careful if using this tactic.

Spiking has been most effective when used to fight large logging operations outside Britain, where the developer's goal is to clear-cut forest and process the timber. Spikes can mangle processing machinery in the saw mill. Where the objective is to stop trees being trashed rather than to stop their felling for timber, spiking may not be very effective - especially as many trees are simply bulldozed here, and usually burnt.

*This text was taken and edited from [Road Raging: Top Tips for Wrecking Roadbuilding](#)
Edited by libcom.org. Last reviewed 2006*

Scaffold tripods guide



In our blockading guide we cover many ways of defending territory. This page goes into more detail about setting up scaffolds which can be used to effectively block roads or small throughways such as factory entrances.

For your basic Tripod, acquire: 3 scaff-poles, about 25 feet long

2 swivelling scaff-clips

Rope (cheap blue poly-prop available from the local hardware shop is fine) Spanner to tighten scaff clip

A Spanner is needed for the nuts on the clips. You also need a fairly large (high if indoors) space for fixing them, experimenting and practising.

It's tricky to get the clips fitted on so that the poles can be held parallel (for carrying etc.) and at the same time be in the right position to erect as a tripod.

The main assembly is formed by securing two poles in an 'A' Shape and using a third to prop the two up.

The securing clip for the third pole has to be about a foot below the 'A' shape clip, this allows the main poles to close over it in the folded position. This clip should be mounted at roughly 120 degrees in relation to the main clip in order to swivel open correctly.

With a little experimentation you will find where to place the clips so that the poles lie parallel for transport yet are easily opened into a tripod.

You will probably need at least 5 people to erect a tripod made with steel poles:

At least one strong person to lift each of the two main legs by walking down beneath it from apex to base;

one person to do the same with the third leg and at a crucial moment, to swing this leg out and to prop up the 'A';

and one person with their foot braced against the base of each main pole to stop it skidding forward.

With aluminium poles the job is easier, demanding only 3 people.

Once the tripod is erected, at least one person must shin up the pole at the speed of light in order to be out of reach at the top.

A simple circumference rope tying the poles together about three feet from the top can be fixed prior to erection if desired and used to take the weight of up to three people

A simple hammock sling is more comfortable and stylish. It's made out of a length of strong light material, such as rip stop nylon, knotted at either end, with the two ends of a short rope tied securely just inside these knots. The rope can be slung over your shoulders as you shin up the poles, and when you reach the top simply slipped over the poles making your stay much more comfortable.

For extra stability and a convivial number at the top, three short horizontal poles with clips can be used as braces. Leave each short pole dangling from one of its clips until the tripod is up, then do up the second clip.

Before climbing remember to take the spanner - you may not have a second chance to get up with it.

A climbing harness and slings make this job easier.

This augmented tripod will be heavier and may require a greater number of people to lift it.

A tripod lacking these bars can be stabilised using a circumference rope linking the legs a couple of feet above the ground. This will secure against collapse due to accidental slippage, but not against attack. Car exhaust clips are useful to stop the ropes riding up.

Hot tip

Painting "L", "R" and "M" on the poles near the bottom, so it's easily visible

Subvertising billboards



A guide to subvertising - altering commercial outdoor poster and billboard advertisements to get your message across.

The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement a comprehensive guide to the alteration of outdoor advertising Introduction

Look up! Billboards have become as ubiquitous as human suffering, as difficult to ignore as a beggar's outstretched fist. Every time you leave your couch or cubicle, momentarily severing the electronic umbilicus, you enter the realm of their impressions. Larger than life, subtle as war, they assault your senses with a complex coda of commercial instructions, the messenger RNA of capitalism. Every time you get in a car, or ride a bus, or witness a sporting event, you receive their instructions. You can't run and you can't hide, because your getaway route is lined to the horizon with signs, and your hidey-hole has a panoramic view of an 8-sheet poster panel.

There are a million stories in the Big City, and as many reasons to want to hack a billboard. We have our reasons, and we don't presume to judge yours. In this manual, we have made a conscious effort to steer clear of ideology and stick to methodology. The procedures outlined here are based on our 20+ years' experience executing billboard improvements professionally, safely, and (knock wood) without injury or arrest. In most cases, it should not be necessary to follow the elaborate, even obsessive precautions we outline here. A can of spray paint, a blithe spirit, and a balmy night are all you really need.

- Blank DeCoverly
BLF Information Systems

1) Selecting a Billboard

In choosing a sign, keep in mind that the most effective alterations are often the simplest. If you can totally change the meaning of an advertisement by changing one or two letters, you'll save a lot of time and trouble. Some ads lend themselves to parody by the inclusion of a small

image or symbol in the appropriate place (a skull, radiation symbol, happy face, swastika, vibrator, etc.). On other boards, the addition of a cartoon "thought bubble" or "speech balloon" for one of the characters might be all that is needed.

Once you have identified a billboard message you wish to improve, you may want to see if there are multiple locations displaying the same advertisement. You should determine which ones give your message optimum visibility. A board on a central freeway will obviously give you more exposure than one on an obscure side street. You must then weigh the location/visibility factor with other crucial variables such as physical accessibility, potential escape routes, volume of foot and vehicular traffic during optimum alteration hours, etc. Of course, if you can improve more than one board in the same campaign, so much the better.

There are several standard sign types in the outdoor advertising industry. Knowing which type of sign you are about to alter may prove useful in planning the operation:

Bulletins are large outdoor sign structures, typically situated alongside federal highways and major urban freeways. They measure 14 x 48 feet and are usually leased in multi-month contracts, meaning that an advertisement will stay in place for at least 60 days.

30-Sheet Poster Panels measure 12 x 25 feet, are situated along primary and secondary roadways, and are usually updated every 30 days.

8-Sheet Poster Panels measure 6 x 12 feet and are usually found in high-density urban neighborhoods and suburban shopping areas. They are designed to reach both pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and are leased in 30-day increments.

Out-of-Home Media is the industry term for advertising targeted at people on the go, including bus shelters, bus exterior s, taxis, subway stations, street furniture (newsstands, benches, kiosks), painted walls, and "indoor out of home" locations like airports and malls.

There are of course many non-standard formats as well, and these frequently make the most intriguing targets. Oversized bulletins, animated signs, painted buildings, and boards with neon all offer unique challenges for advanced operations. Signs featuring large, illuminated text can often be improved simply by turning off a few letters, converting 'HILLSDALE' to 'LSD,' for instance, or 'HOTEL ESSEX' to 'HOT SEX.' The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

2) Planning the Improvement Action

Though the sudden urge to just climb right up a sign and start hacking can occasionally be overwhelming, in our experience this type of "impulse improvement" tends to deliver unsatisfactory results, at unnecessary personal risk. The guidelines that follow draw on the BLF's proud 20-year history of planning and executing such actions without injury or arrest.

A) Accessibility

How do you get up on the board? Will you need your own ladder to reach the bottom of the board's ladder? Can you climb the support structure? Is the board on a building rooftop, and if so, can it be reached from within the building, from a fire escape, or perhaps from an adjoining building? If you need ladders to work the board, they may occasionally be found on platforms on or behind the board, or on adjacent boards or rooftops.

B) Practicality

How big are the letters and/or images you would like to change? How close to the platform at the bottom of the board is your work area? On larger boards you can rig from above and hang over the face to reach points that are too high to reach from below. We don't recommend this method unless you have some climbing and rigging experience. When hanging in one position your work area is very limited laterally. Your ability to leave the scene quickly

diminishes proportionately to how convoluted your position has become. Placing huge words or images is much more difficult.

C) Security After choosing your board, be sure to inspect it, both during the day and at night. Take note of all activities in the area. Who is about at 2:00 a.m.? How visible will you be while scaling the support structure? Keep in mind you will make noise; are there any apartment or office windows nearby? Is anyone home? Walk lightly if you're on a rooftop—who knows who you're walking over.

What is the visibility to passing cars on surface streets and freeways? What can you see from your work position on the board? Even though it is very difficult to see a figure on a dark board at night, it is not impossible. Any point you have line-of-sight vision to is a point from which you can be observed. How close is your board to the nearest police station or Highway Patrol headquarters? What is their patrol pattern in the area? Average response time to Joe Citizen's call? You can get an idea by staking out the area and observing. Is it quiet at night or is there a lot of foot traffic? When the bars let out, will this provide cover—i.e., drunks keeping the cops busy—or will it increase the likelihood of detection by passersby? Do they care? If you are definitely spotted, it may pay to have your ground crew approach them rather than just hoping they don't call the cops. Do not let them connect you with a vehicle. Have your ground crew pretend to be chance passersby and find out what the observer thinks. We've been spotted at work a number of times and most people were amused. You'll find that most people, including officials, don't look up unless given a reason to do so.

Go up on the board prior to your hit. Get a feeling for being there and moving around on the structure at night. Bring a camera—it's a good cover for doing anything you're not supposed to: "Gee, officer, I'm a night photographer, and there's a great shot of the bridge from up here . . ." Check your escape routes. Can you cross over rooftops and leave by a fire escape across the block? etc., etc.

D) Illumination

Most boards are brightly lit by floodlights of some type. Most large boards are shut off some time between 11:00 p.m. and 2:00 am by a time clock control somewhere on or near the board. Smaller boards frequently are controlled by photo-electric cells or conventional timeclocks, also somewhere on the board. If you find the photo-electric cell, you can turn the lights on the board off by taping a small flashlight directly into the cell's "eye." This fools the unit into thinking it's daytime and shutting the lights off.

As noted, most larger boards are controlled by timeclocks. These can be found in the control panels at the base of the support structure and/or behind the board itself. These panels are often locked (particularly those at the structure's base). Unless you are familiar with energized electrical circuitry and devices of this type we caution you to wait until the clock shuts itself off at midnight or so. Many of these boards run 220 volts and could fry you to a crisp.

E) Daytime Hits

We don't recommend this method for most high boards on or near freeways and major roads. It works well for doing smaller boards lower to the ground where the alteration is relatively quick and simple. If you do choose to work in the light, wear coveralls (company name on the back?) and painters' hats, and work quickly. Keep an eye out for parked or passing vehicles bearing the billboard company's or advertiser's name. Each board has the company emblem at its bottom center. If you're on a Sleaze Co. board and a Sleaze Co. truck pulls up, you're probably in trouble. It is unlikely that the workers will try to physically detain you (try bribery if necessary), but they will probably call the cops.

3) Producing Graphical Overlays

Though powerful improvements are occasionally executed with nothing more than a spray can and a sharp wit, most actions require the production of some type of graphical overlay to alter the board's message. The more professional-looking these overlays, the greater impact your modified ad is likely to have on the public. This is not to say that every hit needs to look exactly like an original - this would be prohibitively expensive for most groups, and in these days of computer-assisted photo enhancement, could arguably lead to the accusation that your hit was a binary illusion, crafted on a Macintosh rather than on the urban landscape. While technical competence is a worthy goal to pursue (and a major motivator for the BLF), the success or failure of your alteration will ultimately depend more on the quality of your thinking and the power of your altered message than on how well you can match a font.

A) Choosing a Production Method

Before you get too deep into the design process, you need to decide how the overlays will be produced. If you're lucky enough to have access to commercial sign-printing equipment, you can go the professional route and opt for industry-standard vinyl. Vinyl overlays are strong, light, easy to transport, and easy to apply, but unless you have an industry insider on your team, they will probably be too expensive to produce. If you or a collaborator have late-night access to the facilities of a commercial printer, neighborhood copy shop, or advertising bureau, you may be able to output your overlays on a large-format color printer or plotter. The venerable LaserMaster, with its sturdy coated paper and 36-inch track, is a BLF favorite, but there are many other models in the field.

Printing on paper nearly always requires a process known as "tiling" - cutting the image up into smaller pieces that are then reassembled into a whole. Popular computer programs like Quark Xpress and Adobe PageMaker can perform this function automatically, by selecting the "Tiling" option from the Print menu. If you don't have access to a wide-track printer, try to locate a machine that can handle 11x17 tabloid-sized paper - the bigger your printer's output, the fewer pieces you'll have to tile back together to create a finished overlay. Most neighborhood copy shops and many corporate offices now have color printers/copiers with 11x17 output.

For low cost and maximum durability, consider canvas. When impregnated with oil-based lacquer paint, a canvas overlay has the potential to last longer than the sign surface it's affixed to. It's heavier to carry and more difficult to secure to the sign, but it's a reliable, low-tech alternative that can be implemented inexpensively.

We don't recommend using overlays much larger than 4'x3'. If your message is larger, you should section it and butt the sections together for the finished image. It gets very windy on boards, and large paste-overs are difficult to apply.

B) Scale

If you are changing only a small area (one letter, a small symbol, etc.) you probably do not need to go to any elaborate lengths to match or design your "overlay" (we'll use this term to describe the finished image/lettering you'll be applying to the board). Just take actual measurements or tracings directly off the board. If, however, you intend to create overlays of great size and/or number of letters and you want the finished image to look as much as possible like the advertisers themselves had made it, you should plan on more elaborate preparation. Find a position roughly level with the board and looking at it square on (200 to 1000 or so feet away). Photograph the board from this position and make a tracing from a large print of the photo. Using measurements you have taken on the board (height, width, letter height, etc.), you can create a scale drawing of your intended alteration. From this, it is

possible to determine how large your overlays will need to be and what spacing will be required between letters.

C) Color Matching

There are two basic ways to match the background and/or colors of the lettering or image area:

On painted or paper boards you can usually carve a small (1"x1") sample directly off the board. This does not always work on older painted boards which have many thick layers of paint.

Most large paint stores carry small paint sampler books. It is possible to get a pretty close match from these samplers. We suggest sticking to solid colors and relatively simple designs for maximum visual impact.

D) Letter Style

If you wish to match a letter style exactly, pick up a book of fonts from a graphic arts store or borrow one from a self-serve print shop. Use this in conjunction with tracings of existing letters to create the complete range of lettering needed for your alteration. You can convincingly fake letters that aren't on the board by finding a closely matching letter style in the book and using tracings of letters from your photo of the board as a guide for drawing the new letters.

E) Producing Overlays From Computer Output

Computers with desktop publishing software offer many advantages to the modern billboard liberator. Fonts and colors can be matched precisely, professional-looking graphical elements can be added to your text message, and scale and spacing become much easier to calculate. There are many software packages suitable for producing overlays, including PageMaker, Quark Xpress, Illustrator, Freehand, CorelDraw, and various CAD programs. Adobe Photoshop gives you the additional flexibility of being able to preview your hit - just scan in a photograph of the original board and apply your modification over it as an independent layer.

After you have designed the overlay and printed out your tiles, you'll need to assemble the individual printouts jigsaw-style and glue them onto some sort of backing material. Heavy pattern paper works best for this, but you can also use 1/8-inch foamcore for smaller overlays, i.e. those less than 30 inches on a side. Start in one corner, adhering the first tile with spray adhesive to the backing material. Carefully assemble the rest of the tiles, trimming off unprinted margin space as required and laying them down one at a time, making sure all the edges are well-secured. If you get a little off-kilter at some point in the process and the pieces don't line up with absolute precision, don't worry - large-scale work is more forgiving since people will be viewing it at a distance. When all the tiles are secured, reinforce the edges with clear packing tape. If it's going to be a wet night, or if there's a chance your work may stay up for a few days or more, consider weather-proofing your overlay with a coat of clear lacquer.

F) Tiling With a Photocopier

If you don't have access to a computer with desktop publishing software, but do have access to a good copy machine, you can duplicate the procedure described above using the copier's "enlarge" function. First, create a scale original of your overlay on a single sheet of paper, using stencils or rub-off lettering. Next, pencil a grid over your drawing, with each square being equivalent to the largest size of paper the copier can accommodate (letter, legal, tabloid, etc.). Cut the original into pieces along the penciled lines, then enlarge each piece on the copier, going through as many generations as necessary until each piece fills its own sheet

of paper. Assemble the pieces as described above, adding color with lacquer paints or permanent markers. Weatherproof if desired.

G) Producing Overlays by Hand

We recommend using heavy pattern paper and high-gloss, oil-based lacquer paints. The lacquer paint suffuses the paper, making it super-tough, water resistant, and difficult to tear. For making overlays, roller coat the background and spray paint the lettering through cardboard cut-out templates of the letters. For extremely large images or panels, use large pieces of painted canvas. The canvas should be fairly heavy to avoid being ripped to shreds by the winds that buffet most billboards. Glue and staple 1"x4" pine boards the entire horizontal lengths of the top and bottom of the canvas. The canvas will then roll up like a carpet for transportation and can be unrolled over the top of the board and lowered into place by ropes.

H) Methods of Application

Although there are many types of adhesive that can be used, we recommend rubber cement. Rubber cement is easily removable (but if properly applied will stay up indefinitely) and does not damage or permanently mark the board's surface. This may become important if you're apprehended and the authorities and owners attempt to assess property damage. Application of rubber cement on large overlays is tricky. You need to evenly coat both the back-side of the overlay and the surface of the board that is to be covered. Allow one to two minutes drying time before applying the paper to the board. To apply the cement, use full sized (10") house paint rollers and a five-gallon plastic bucket. Have one person coat the back of the overlays while another coats the board's surface. Both people will be needed to affix the coated overlay to the finished board surface. On cool nights there may be condensation on the board, in which case the area to be covered needs to be wiped down first - use shop towels or a chamois for this.

To level overlay panels on the board, measure up from the bottom (or down from the top) of the board to the bottom line of where it needs to be in order to cover the existing copy. Make small marks at the outermost left and right-hand points. Using a chalk snap line with two people, snap a horizontal line between these two points. This line is your marker for placing your overlay(s).

If you have a canvas or paper overlay as described in (F) above, you can either tie the four corners and middle (top and bottom) very securely, or, if you can reach the face of the board by ladder or rope, attach the panel by screwing the 1"x4" boards to the billboard. A good battery powered drill is needed for this. We recommend hex-head "Tek" sheet metal screws, #8 or #10 size. Use a hex head driver bit for your drill. These screws work well on either wood backboards or sheet metal.

4) Executing the Hit

Once you've completed your preparations and are ready for the actual hit, there are many things which can be done to minimize the risk of apprehension and/or injury:

A) Personnel

Have the smallest number of people possible on the board. Three is about optimum-two for the actual work and one lookout/communications person. Depending on your location, you may require additional spotting personnel on the ground (see below).

B) Communications

For work on larger boards where you're exposed for longer periods of time, we recommend compact CB units or FM-band walkie-talkies. Low cost CB walkie-talkies are available from Radio Shack and elsewhere, and can be fitted with headsets and microphones for ease of use.

Have one or two cars positioned at crucial intersections within sight of the board. The ground crew should monitor oncoming traffic and maintain radio contact with the lookout on the board. (Note: Do not use the popular CB or FM channels; there are many other frequencies to choose from. A verbal code is a good idea since the channels you will be using will not be secure.)

It's crucial that the ground crew don't lounge around their vehicle(s) or in any other way make it obvious that they're hanging around in a (likely) desolate area late at night for no apparent reason. A passing patrol car will notice them much sooner than they will notice operatives on the board. Keep a low profile. We've found that lookouts dressed as winos, or as homeless couples, are virtually invisible additions to the urban landscape. Park all vehicles out of sight of the operation.

C) Safety

The risk of apprehension on a board pales in comparison to the risk of falling, and safety concerns should always prevail over security. If you're not an experienced climber, you're better off helping out on the ground: as a security lookout, graphic designer or publicist. Even if you are an experienced climber, we don't recommend solo actions on any board larger than 8 panels (6x12 feet). Ideally, all field actions should incorporate the buddy system, but particularly those that require any sort of rigging. If you're going to lean over the top of the board to affix any overlays, you should have a secured partner belaying you. It's a long way down, so be careful up there.

D) Clean-up

Billboard structures are notorious trash magnets as it is; don't make matters worse by leaving your empty glue tubes, discarded vinyl backing, cigarette butts and empties on the property. The responsible billboard liberator leaves nothing of his own behind (not even fingerprints), though he may on occasion leave a cold six-pack for the benefit of those hard-working signmen assigned to the unglamorous task of un-altering his alteration.

E) Escape

If you've done your homework, you'll know the terrain surrounding the board quite well. In the event of detection, prepare a number of alternate routes out of the area, and a rendezvous point with the ground support crew. If a patrol is approaching and you are in a difficult spot for quickly ditching and hiding (hanging on a rope in the middle of the board, for instance), it may be better simply to stay still until they pass. Movement is more likely to catch the eye.

Once on the ground, if pursuit is imminent, hiding may be your safest bet. If you've covered the terrain carefully, you'll be aware of any good hiding spots. Keep in mind that if the police do a thorough search (doubtful, but not impossible), they will use high-powered spotlights from cars and flashlights if on foot.

Stashed clothing in your hiding spot may prove useful. A business suit, perhaps, or rumpled and vomit-encrusted leisure wear. Be creative.

4) Publicizing Your Action

Like the advertisements they improve, your actions should aim for the greatest possible reach. Try to time your improvement so it stays up for as long as possible, and generates the greatest possible number of "impressions." Actions executed at the beginning of a holiday weekend tend to stay up longest, since repair crews are less readily available. Yet even if your improvement survives for two or three days on a major urban thoroughfare, it won't attain the kind of reach you can get with media attention.

A) Photographs

Color slides are best for magazine and newspaper submissions, but online publishers prefer high-resolution .jpeg files. Be sure to get a good "before" picture of the board to be altered, ideally taken from the same camera position and at the same time of day (or night) as the "after" photograph. An "after" picture should be taken as soon as possible after the action is completed; if you want a daytime shot as well, come back for it later.

B) Press Releases

May be serious or surreal, according to your motives and whim. Basically a cover letter for your photographs, which comprise the essence of the story. Most libraries carry one of the major PR reference guides, which list contacts for every printed publication and broadcast company in the country (while you're there, research standard AP style for press releases). Better yet, record your manifesto on an audio cassette or CD, then tape it to the bottom of a payphone outside a reporter's office and call in your "anonymous tip." The more creative you are, the more likely you are to get the desired response.

Postscript

If anyone reading this primer finds it of any use in their own advertising endeavors, we at the BLF will consider it successful. We believe roadside advertising enhancement is a pastime more individuals should engage in. It's not that difficult to do smaller, low-to-the-ground boards. A quick hit-and-run on such a board will not require all of the elaborate preparations and precautions we have detailed. The more "real" messages we have on the freeways and streets, the better.

- R.O. Thornhill
BLF Education Officer
- Blank DeCoverly
BLF Minister of Propaganda

© copyright 1990, 1999 by Billboard Liberation Front. Reprint permission granted to non-profit, anti-authoritarian websites and periodicals. Commercial websites and publishers may not reproduce this manual or any portion of it except for review purposes

The Art & Science of Billboard Improvement was originally published in Processed World magazine. We wish to thank the PW staff for their help in making this document possible. Thanks also to Lloyd Void and Paizley Hayes of Twisted Times magazine, the Institute of Media Deconstruction, the Institute of Rational Analysis of National Trends, and -- of course -- the sign industry.

Pre-press services made possible by a grant from the FUCK YOU, IT'S ART! Foundation.

Published in the USA by Infohazard Heavy Industries, a non-traceable subsidiary of NeverMind, Inc. Text taken from www.billboardliberation.com

Prison organising



Practical advice guides on supporting class struggle prisoners or surviving prison yourself, from letter-writing to prison slang, staying safe to getting involved in prison struggles.

If you're struggling for a better world, there is a chance that someone you know or even you yourself could go to prison. Thousands of people have been jailed for standing up for themselves and their communities - be they strikers, anti-war demonstrators, non-payers of unfair taxes...

The following articles are guides to help people deal with various aspects of prison life.

Prison survival guide



A guide to surviving prison or preparing yourself to go to prison, with tips on staying safe, prison etiquette, how to deal with guards and other prisoners, how to get involved in organising and struggle, and more.

Introduction

Imprisonment as a form of punishment can be traced back to Greek times, but until relatively recently long-term incarceration was extremely rare, only flourishing in modern times after transportation to 'the colonies' became unviable (in no small part due to the American Revolution).

Traditionally, those that offended against society were punished publicly, generally in the most brutal way, from the stocks to the gibbet. Public executions, often with attendant torture and/or mutilation, were the norm in this country until the 17th century. Even when they were abolished it was not out of any sense of decency or humanity, but according to the Oxford History of the Prison, because they had "become the occasion of rowdiness and disgust - both

because the crowd had begun to identify with the victim, not the executioner, and because the spectacle had become revolting, offending a new sensibility about pain and bodily integrity. Thus, it became desirable to mete out punishment away from the public gaze."

Today, prison is still very much a closed world, and while within the past two decades TV cameras have occasionally been able to show a very limited view of life behind bars, they rarely capture anything more than that which the authorities wish them to see. The true misery of imprisonment is deliberately kept secret from the general public, while the right-wing press and unscrupulous politicians conspire to present a picture of cushy 'holiday camps' and 'health farms'. The prison authorities do everything within their power (legal and illegal) to prevent investigative journalists having contact with prisoners and vice-versa, while Michael Howard and Jack Straw imposed a ban preventing visiting journalists reporting anything at all. Though the ban has subsequently been deemed unlawful, the vast majority of journalists are so lazy, cowardly, and/or clueless that it might as well still be in place.

With the British prison population currently growing at a rate of four hundred a week, and New Labour's draconian policies criminalising dissent, as a political activist it is more likely that you will see the inside of a prison cell than at any time in recent history. For those committed to the overthrow of the state, imprisonment has to be seen as an occupational hazard, and as such it's better to consider it beforehand, rather than when it's too late.

During my life I've spent time in over 20 British prisons (plus at least a dozen more I've visited or 'stopped over' at) including local prisons, remand centres, long-term Category B prisons, all Britain's maximum security dispersal prisons, a couple of Category A units and 16 segregation units. I've been around a bit, but I've never been anywhere near a low security or 'open' prison, and though I correspond with a number of women prisoners, I've obviously never been held in a women's prison. So while I think I'm pretty well qualified to talk about the prison experience, there are limits to what I know, and inevitably this piece reflects that.

Preparing for prison

If you know you're going to be imprisoned, at least that gives you a head start. Maybe you can even talk to someone who's been in your local nick, and who knows the rules and can give you an idea what to expect. The 'unknown' is the scariest thing of all, isn't it? Prison is the worst thing our society has.

The most common fear, certainly among men, seems to be that if they get locked up they'll 'have to go in the showers with Mr. Big.' Forget that - predatory homosexuality is as rare in British prisons as malt whisky, in fact in some prisons it's a great deal rarer. There's probably more chance of you being raped or sexually assaulted 'outside' than in here. I have never actually come across a single occurrence.

Then there's the fear of non-sexual violence - are you going to be locked up with a load of thugs and psychopaths who'll cut your throat as soon as look at you? Again, this is largely exaggerated, but violence does exist in prison. However, it's a relatively simple matter to minimise the likelihood of being attacked. In my experience there's far less random violence in prison than in wider society. I was in an adult long-term prison at 19, and the only time I've ever been attacked it was by the screws.

The prison lexicon

While some words of prison slang are hundreds of years old, others are being introduced all the time. Here are just a few examples:

Adidas sex-case: prison issue plimsolls.

Apple or Apple core: Score - 20, hence 20 years or £20.

Bang up: time locked in cell.

Bed-leg: a homemade cosh. The word comes from the small section of steel pipe used to separate prison bunks, which would be put in a sock to make a weapon.

Burglars: security or 'DST' ('Dedicated Search Team').

Chip-net: safety net strung between landings.

Cucumbers (or 'Numbers' or 'Protection'): 'Nonces' or 'Bacons' (sex offenders) and other 'Protection-heads' (debtors, grasses, cell thieves etc.) are usually segregated for their own safety under Prison Rule 45 (formerly 43). They should not be confused with prisoners held in the block (the segregation unit) under Prison Rule 45 GOAD (Good Order and Discipline).

Diesel: prison tea.

The enchanted: prisoners on the 'Enhanced Privilege Level'.

Ghosting: to be transferred to another prison, suddenly and without notice.

Jam-roll: parole.

Jimmy or Jimmy Boyle: foil used by smackheads to smoke heroin.

Kangas (or 'Scoobys'): screws.

L-Plates: a life sentence.

Little fellers: cigarette butts.

Midnight: Midnight mass - grass.

Pad: a cell.

Patches: a prison uniform with prominent yellow panels worn by prisoners captured after an escape or following an attempted escape.

Peter: an older name for a cell,

also for a safe.

Pie and liquor: the vicar.

Salmon or Salmon and trout -

Snout: tobacco.

Shit and a shave (or shit and a shower): a short sentence.

Spin: a search (as in 'pad-spin').

Stiff: a smuggled note.

Stretch: a sentence or a year (a '10 stretch' is a 10 year sentence).

Tram lines: a distinctive scar caused by a prison-made weapon which uses two razor blades melted into a toothbrush.

Wet-up (or Jug-up): to scald someone, usually with a mixture of boiling water and sugar.

Staying safe comes down to basics. Stay alert and learn some manners - prison is a close environment containing too many people, so manners are extra important. Be polite to people, treat them with mutual respect, don't be nosy or impinge on their limited personal space, never borrow things without asking, don't boast or bullshit, never grass anyone up, and even more importantly, avoid drugs (heroin) and stay away from junkies. When I was at Full Sutton in 1996, there was an average of one stabbing a week, but almost all of them were related to smack.

While adult prisons, particularly long-term ones, tend to be a fairly mature environment, 'Young Offenders Institutions' (for those under 21) can be different, and violence less easy to avoid. The general advice still applies though - be assertive not aggressive, but don't let people take liberties with you, and if necessary be prepared to fight. Some self defence training may give you an edge, but be warned that prison fights are always dirty - you can expect to be bitten, scalded, stabbed, coshed, and/or attacked by multiple assailants. Attacks are likely to take place in the showers or when the victim is still in bed.

In reality, it's not other prisoners you should be worried about, they will become your friends and comrades. In the harsh prison environment bonds will be forged that can last a lifetime. Your problems will come from the system, and from the screws, particularly if you're a person of integrity. From the very first moment you enter prison your principles, your sense of selfhood, and your very humanity will be under attack. If you are to survive unbroken, you must resist all attempts to turn you into a numbered, subjugated, compliant piece of jail-fodder, a 'Stepford Prisoner' who has had their spine and brain removed. You are, after all, not just an individual, but a member of a movement, and those that come after you will be judged by how you behave.

Unfortunately, for those of you entering prison today, the level of political consciousness among British prisoners is at the lowest point for many years. Divide and rule scams like the loathsome 'Incentives and Earned Privileges' scheme have undermined solidarity, and in-cell TVs and heroin have helped a culture of selfishness to develop. You will hear people come out with things like, "I can't afford to get involved" or "I've done my bit" or "I just want to get out." Ignore these wankers, they're just trying to justify their own cowardice. Everybody wants to get out of these rotten places, but how do you want to get out - on your feet or on

your knees? Resistance and solidarity will always exist within prisons, and if you have anything about you at all, your place is with that resistance, not with the grovellers and forelock-tuggers who shit on their fellow cons in the foolish belief that they can make a comfortable life for themselves in here.

Prison Receptions, the entry point into any jail (unless you go straight to the punishment block - the segregation unit), have changed a lot since the days when you were very likely to be met with a beating, but they are still inevitably an unpleasant experience. It is here that your prison file will be opened, that you will be given a number, where strangers will begin to address you by your surname only, where others will decide what clothes you can wear and what possessions you can have, and where you will receive your first strip-search. It is in Reception that the battle begins.

The first Prison Reception I was ever in was at Canterbury in 1980. There were certainly worse places back then, but there were still some vicious screws working there. In every nick in the country they used to read you a little speech at Reception, part of which went, "You will call all prison officers 'Sir'." So it didn't take long for my first confrontation to come, I would not, and will not, be forced to call anyone 'Sir'. Nor was I prepared to substitute 'boss' or 'guv'nor' as was acceptable in some prisons. Like a lot of principles it's ostensibly a small thing, it would be so easy to compromise, especially when almost everyone else does, but what are we without principles? Once you start abandoning them for the sake of convenience, who's to say where it will end? I remember a few years ago when I was forced onto a blanket protest at Durham. Having failed to intimidate and bully me into putting on the prison clothes, the screws tried persuasion - "You're alone down here in the punishment block, away from your mates, nobody will even know you've put them on." But I'd have known, and the screws would have known, and that was enough.

Today there's no longer an obligation to call your captors 'Sir', and many nicks no longer require you to wear prison clothes, but your integrity will still be tested, and you will have to struggle to retain it. Relinquish it, and I imagine prison will have far more of a lasting effect on you than if you spend the whole of your sentence in the block.

Screws often behave like playground bullies and when you come into a new nick, they'll try it on to see how much they can get away with. A classic example is to try to get you to 'squat' or bend over during a strip-search - tell them to fuck off. Every prison has its own rules about what you can and can't have, and they change constantly, but if you know you're getting sent down you can still try to be prepared. Often, little can be sent in after you're imprisoned, so have anything you need and might be able to have with you. Most prisons allow you to wear your own training shoes these days, so get yourself a good sturdy pair. Prisoners generally wear sports clothes, which are easily cared for, avoid black and dark blue colours which aren't always allowed, and go for cotton fabrics that will survive the prison laundry. A radio or small stereo will be useful, as will one or two books, and some basic stationery. A watch is more or less essential, ideally get one that doesn't require batteries, is tough and waterproof (so you can wear it in the shower), but not unduly expensive or ostentatious. While highly desirable, food and drink and toiletries won't be allowed. If you smoke (and it's a big advantage not to), you may be permitted to keep a small amount of tobacco. Make sure you have cash with you, so that you can buy phonecards and other items you need from the prison shop.

There was a time when every cell contained a copy of the prison rules, and prisoners were required to read them. Now the prison authorities generally do their best to keep them secret, because they are so regularly broken. You will find it useful to consult the Prison Rules and Standing Orders, which outline your few rights and entitlements, and they should be available

in the prison library. The Prison Service also publishes its own information booklets, but the contents are very selective. If you have difficulty getting hold of a copy of the rules, or think you are not getting what you're entitled to, as regards diet or exercise for example, either contact your solicitor or the Prisoners Advice Service at the address given elsewhere in this section. Prisoners' letters are generally censored, and so have to be handed in or posted with the envelopes unsealed. However, you may write to a solicitor or the Prisoners Advice Service in confidence under Prison Rule 39. Contrary to what you may be told, you do not have to allow a member of staff to seal the envelope for you, and if you do not have stamps you can ask for a 'Special Letter', which should be sent at public expense. Simply seal the envelope, write your name and 'Rule 39' on the back, and hand it in or post it in the box provided.

There is a good deal of variation in prison architecture, from the ancient cathedrals of human misery to the stark modern control-units. The accommodation parts of prisons are known as 'wings' or 'houseblocks', and they generally have cells on 'landings' or 'spurs' on more than one level, known as 'the ones', 'the twos' etc. Most modern prison cells are approximately 7ft x 11ft, but some are a good deal smaller, and in some prisons each cell may contain 2, or even 3 prisoners. Personally, I am not prepared to share a space that small with another person, and if necessary will opt for a single cell in the block. Prisoners are having to spend more time locked in their cells than for many years, but you should not be 'banged up' for more than 23 hours at a time.

Prison really is a bizarre institution to come into, and it'll take you a while to get used to it. Humans are an adaptable species though, and within a few weeks you'll probably find you're cracking on like an old lag. If you're on remand though, this can be a time when you fuck up, and it's something I always warn people about. Time is different in jail and particularly when you're first locked up, a couple of days can seem like a month. It's a harsh environment, and you'll be spending a lot of time with the same people. Many of these will turn out to be good friends, but always try to bear in mind that in reality, you've known them for days or weeks, not years, and that not everyone in jail tells the truth about themselves. In particular, be wary about discussing the details of your case with those you hardly know - too many people wind up in court with former cell-mates giving evidence against them. Also be careful about giving out your home address or personal details until you know your new friends a lot better.

There's a thousand scams and tricks in jail - cons are extremely inventive people and are always one step ahead of the screws. As you pick up your jail-craft, you'll learn everything from how to pass a cigarette from one end of the wing to the other, how to make prison 'hooch' without yeast, how to make weapons out of next to nothing, how to defeat electronic door systems, how to make a cup of tea without a kettle, and all sorts of other survival skills. When you first get locked up, you'll doubt that you could last more than week in this environment, but in all likelihood you will, and will even share in the gallows humour endemic to this otherwise joyless existence.

The human spirit can flourish and triumph in the face of the darkest adversity, but I'm not going to tell you that prisons are anything other than utterly rotten places, particularly for those of us who have to endure year after year of long-term imprisonment. Prison kills you physically and psychologically - it's a living death, like being buried alive. I once read about a Native American woman who suddenly woke up from a coma as if from sleep. She wanted to know where her husband and her children were, but she'd been unconscious so long her husband had remarried and her children grown up. It's a tragic story, but at least she didn't have the slow torture of having to watch, helpless, as her life slipped away from her, together with everything she cared about. That's how it is for most long-term prisoners, and many lose their families, homes, jobs, savings, and possessions even before their cases come to trial.

Hang onto your integrity, because when the system's finished with you and spits you back out on the street, it may be all you have left.

But hey, nobody said it was going to be easy - if it was easy they wouldn't call it 'struggle' would they? As political activists we're the lucky ones in here, given a rare opportunity to get inside the machine and act like a virus. As an activist, you're not locked up to take a holiday - there's a real struggle to be fought in here, so keep militant and get involved...

By Mark Barnsley, Whitemoor Prison, England

More notes on surviving prison

Britain has the largest prison population per capita in Europe and if the government has its way it'll carry on growing! More and more people are likely to do time for crimes they did or didn't commit, partly because the state is always creating more + more laws that we can break, especially laws criminalising political protest. The fear of prison is one of the state's ultimate deterrents to stifle dissent and protect the ruling classes from the wrath and poverty of the masses. This deterrent only works as effectively as we are fearful of it, and this is an attempt to dispel some of the fears and myths that surround prison.

Experiences of prison can vary greatly from person to person and from prison to prison. Obviously there's a big difference between a short stay and a long stretch, not so much on the experience while there but mentally it can be harder to remain unaffected, and will take longer to re-adjust to the outside world as it will have changed more, and old skills will have to be remembered. Being in prison on remand can be mentally and emotionally taxing, because of the uncertainty regarding length of sentence, and the stress of an approaching court case, etc. Women's prisons are also quite different, not only are you likely to be further from friends and family because of the scarcity of women's' prisons but my women are in for gender/poverty related in a way that men aren't, basically because most coppers/judges are male chauvinists. Category 'A' prisoners (high security) also have less privileges than Category 'B', 'C' and 'D' respectively. It should be remembered worldwide, British prisons have a reputation for being soft compared to elsewhere especially outside of Europe.

If you know in advance that you're going to be going inside it's helpful to talk to others with experience of prison. It's good to tie up any loose ends regarding family, housing, money, support before you go in. Also get a few good reading books together!

This section is aimed mostly at those who do time for political 'crimes' or crimes(?) of conscience although it can apply to anyone. Some political activists see going to prison as a natural extension of direct action. Political prisoners have the advantage of being part of a wider movement, which can offer practical support and boost moral. Having a good understanding of why you are there can give a degree of inner strength, calm and confidence and so from this perspective prison can be an empowering experience, and can also be somewhat amusing at times as well!

Most folk on knowing they're about to go down have a flood of varied emotions and/or passing attacks of anxiety and fear. It can feel like the whole weight of the world is falling upon your head.

with the threat of prison hanging over my head I try and find out as much as I possibly can about the prison I am likely to be sent to... I worry about what the other prisoners are like; will I fit in? How much stuff I can take with me? Will I be on my own or sharing? When I arrive different questions become a problem: where do I go to eat, to shower, where is everything, this place is big. After you come out of prison, take a holiday, or rest, to give yourself time to adjust to being out again and having space to move about. Give yourself time and tell others how you are feeling.

"Prisons and prison experiences vary enormously.. the first time I went to a British prison

was one of the most hellish weeks of my life: I was beaten up by the guards, denied a vegan diet, taken before the governor three times (and threatened with everything from the punishment block to the psychiatric wing) and put in a cell with someone in for murder and someone in for manslaughter. In contrast, much of my five months in another prison was a leisurely rest - badminton, jogging, table tennis, evening classes, my own cell, passable vegan food, friendly enough screws

I had sort of expected I was going to prison and actually felt quite prepared and calm. As the prison van pulled up at the gates I felt a strange sort of excitement mixed with a bit of nervousness and uncertainty. I found it fairly easy to settle in after the initial 'crikey! I'm in prison' type feelings. Getting used to the regime can be a bit hard - so many rules. When your life is totally in the hands of authoritarians you just have to adapt and get used to it, and know that they can't confine your thoughts or hold your true freedom. It's important to use the time well with things to focus your mind. There lots of potential for self development and learning from people of different backgrounds. I really benefited from doing lots of meditation and tai chi, which helped me keep calm, especially when dealing with some of the screws who would try and draw me into confrontation because of my beliefs

However the reality is a lot easier than the fears, and when you start meeting the other cons you realise most of them are just ordinary enough people brought here by unfortunate circumstances, rather than the social monsters the government and media would have you believe. Obviously there are some nutters but they aren't that common, and let's face it there are plenty of nutters on the outside as well! Very few people are looking for a fight because that can mean time in solitary and less parole, so if you're not looking for trouble you're unlikely to find it. If you try and act hard, someone's going to challenge you, so just be yourself and be calmly confident, and, keep a good sense of humour!

Political prisoners tend to get a fair bit of respect in prison, if not a few strange looks for having somewhat alien beliefs. Most trouble in prison is over drugs and addictions (including tobacco) and bullying to get them when personal supplies run low (the prison shop's only open once/twice a week and everyone's skint anyway)... Time to give up? Sometimes, especially if it's obviously your first time inside, you may find yourself challenged in some way by other prisoners, as a kind of test of strength which as long as you stand your ground in a calm but confident manner, will generally pass off without incident. Backing down to any threats or bullying leaves you wide open for abuse and bullying later if you become seen as an easy victim, so stand your ground. It's pretty similar to school playground philosophy really.

An open mind and a bit of common respect can go a long way in prison meeting half-way the many different lives, experiences and expectations that you'll meet there. It can be a time of learning and an insight into the inner workings of Babylon, both in the oppressive and overly bureaucratic organisation of prison and in the inmates themselves, most of whom are in for some kind of poverty (class) related crime. Prison can be a lonely place, it is designed to isolate. Communication and solidarity is essential, both with other inmates and with the outside world as well. Political prisoners usually get a lot of support correspondence from the wider movement, this gives a big boost to morale and in some cases can be a lifeline (make sure they know you're there - see contacts below) It also makes a prisoner feel less anonymous, less of a number in a system to be pushed about.

Adapting to prison regime can be strange (if not interesting)... it's a culture unto itself- so many new rules and regulations, new behaviour norms, respective routines, social hierarchies, different language. You can expect some overcrowding, frustrating and irritating levels of noise and distraction and little personal space or privacy. It may be difficult to sleep

properly, radios blaring, bars, loud arguments etc. Food will be starchy and dull. You will learn to wait...for a phone call, a shower, a meal, the answer to a question even the time of day. Time can become distorted, days will slip by but each hour could seem like an eternity. Focusing your mind on something like a campaign, reading, studying, drawing, yoga etc. can be a great help in dealing with the monotony and stresses of prison life.

Different diets can be catered for upon request although you are only guaranteed a vegan diet if you're a member of the Vegan society before getting sent down. Some progress has been made recently on getting GMO-free diets, although such decisions (as are most decisions regarding personal welfare) are at the arbitrary discretion of the individual prison Governor. Visits and the sending of books, money stereos, what you can and can't send in/out varies greatly from prison to prison so check with the Prison Visitor Centre concerned. The screws are generally alright, if not a bit uptight, with a predisposition towards having authoritarian fantasies. Their prime concern is to preserve order through obedience and submission. However you don't have to indulge them in this fantasy and as long as you don't take the piss they generally leave you alone. Let them be responsible for keeping order while you stay responsible for keeping your conscience.

A sense of humour goes a long way in dealing with the daily routine of being inside, and a smile can disarm all but the meanest screws and cons. Sometimes it's hard not to laugh at those in authority when they take themselves far too seriously especially if their authority and power in not having the desired effect on you. Just because your body is behind bars doesn't mean you've got turn in your conscience or convictions with all your other belongings at the gate. Whether in prison or not, the freedom we enjoy is the freedom we claim for ourselves, and while the body can be incarcerated the spirit is as free as it wishes. Being in prison can be an incredibly empowering experience by bringing this message home.

When you come out, give yourself time to adjust. If you've been in for a while, take it easy, it can take a while to psychologically adjust to looking after yourself again - cooking, cleaning, socialising. Tell friends how you're feeling and above all keep smiling, 'cos there's nothing you can't laugh at...

From the [UHC Collective](#) website

Notes on this text

The first part of this guide is taken and edited from an article "Preparing for Prison" by Mark Barnsley, from Whitemoor Prison, England written for [Do or Die](#). We are glad to say that at the time of printing Mark Barnsley is now out of prison. Prisons Mark Barnsley has been in are:

HMP Canterbury (x3), HMP Maidstone (x2), Ashford Remand Centre (x2), HMP Wormwood Scrubs (x5), HMP Armley (x3), HMP Hull (x2), Wolds Remand Centre, HMP Doncaster (x2), HMP Lincoln, HMP Full Sutton (x3), HMP Brixton, HMP Wolds, HMP Garth, HMP Durham, HMP Long Lartin, HMP Cardiff, HMP Woodhill (x2), HMP Parkhurst, HMP Wakefield (x2), HMP Frankland, HMP Whitemoor.

The second part is edited from the article "Surviving prison" from the [UHC Collective](#) website.

Edited by libcom.org, last reviewed 2006

Prisoner support guide



A guide to providing support to prisoners in UK jails, from letter-writing and visits to sending reading materials and more.

Adopt a prisoner

If you're active in a group or campaign why not choose one or two prisoners to consistently support. Pass cards round meetings, send useful stuff, knock up a flyposter and get their case some publicity if they could use it, get in touch with the prisoner's support group if there is one. Of course you can take this on as an individual, too.

Starting out

Since practice and procedure varies considerably from prison to prison and is liable to change in each prison, it is impossible to provide a template of procedures that will cover all cases. What can be done from experience is to put down a few pointers and pose a set of questions that those undertaking the support will need to address.

Firstly, it may be necessary to find out what the prison rules are about:

- :> Visits
- :> What can and cannot be sent in
- :> Property
- :> Money
- :> What the scope is for the prisoner to communicate outwards
- :> Arrangements for release and travel warrants.

If things are reasonable the prisoner will be able to get that information to you but you can also phone the prison and ask. There is no harm in developing contacts within the prison officialdom as that may have long term benefits.

Writing to prisoners/sending things

Prison is isolation, so contact with the outside world, letting a prisoner know s/he is not forgotten, helps break this down. Sometimes just a friendly card can boost their morale. Writing for the first time to a complete stranger can be awkward. A card with some well wishes, a bit about who you are and asking what you can do to help is often enough. Don't expect prisoners to write back. Sometimes, the number of letters they can receive/write is restricted, or they just might not be very good at writing back. To help, include a couple of stamps or, if writing abroad, International Reply Coupons (IRC's) that you can get from any post office. Write on clean paper and don't re-use envelopes. Remember a return address, also on the envelope.

Ask what the prisoner can have sent to them, as this varies from prison to prison. Books and pamphlets usually have to be sent from a recognised distributor/bookshop/publisher (ask at a friendly bookshop). Tapes, videos, writing pads, zines, toiletries and postal orders are some

of the things you might be able to send. Newspapers can often be provided (usually by a local newsagent recognised by the prison). Food just gets eaten by screws.

Remember that all letters are opened and looked through so don't write stuff that could endanger anyone – this doesn't mean you should be over paranoid and write one meaningless comment on the weather after the other. Be prepared to share a bit of your life to brighten up someone's on the inside.

e.g. We received a letter from Herman Wallace, after sending him a card from the group. He said:

It is quite essential that I take out a moment to express my gratitude to all the wonderful folk who sent me so much love & support in this one card. I am really touched by the intensity of energy from this card and I just had to stand up from my seat and smile. Thankyou. Right now, in spite of my repressive condition you guys have made me feel GREAT!

Protest letters

Petitioning Tony Blair asking him to stop being a capitalist bastard might well be futile. But writing letters to relevant places requesting something realistic such as an appeal, transfer, vegan food etc on behalf of a prisoner can help improve their chances. Prisoners who seem to be 'in the public eye' do tend to be treated better.

Visiting

Remember too that each prison will have a Visiting Committee and at least one Chaplain, plus a Quaker visitor. These can be most useful allies in getting over any communication difficulties and helping if there are problems. The prison will provide you with names and contacts.

Other support

There is so much more than can be done, up to you and your imagination and your contact with a prisoner, such as publicity for their case, financial support, pickets of prisons, helping them get a mobile phone, any legal support issues to be dealt with, such as getting documents, research, liaison with lawyers etc....

Edited and added to by libcom.org from two articles from the [UHC Collective](#) website. Last reviewed 2006

General organising



This page contains basic information on running a political or campaign group democratically.

The more democratic a group or campaign is, the more effective it is, as all people involved can have an input and feel a part of the project.

Although often basic, this information is essential for the smooth-running of an organisation and sticking to these simple guidelines can make the difference between a long lasting successful group and a failure.

Below find tips on many aspects of organising, from facilitating meetings and financing your group, to structure and making decisions.

How to start a group



A basic guide to getting started with setting up a political or campaigning organisation.

There are four simple requirements for an effective organisation.

People

People is pretty self-explanatory. To have a group you need more than one person and really at least five before it becomes sustainable. For example, for an anarchist group, in most places anarchists are not very hard to come across. In most countries at least 1 in a 1,000 to 1 in 10,000 people might consider themselves an anarchist. So even in fairly small towns there are likely to be at least a dozen or so 'anarchists'.

Unfortunately the next step most groups take is to try and set up a group which includes just about everyone that adopts the label. This may seem like the logical thing but problems arise when we look at the next two requirements.

Politics

For a group to be effective it has to have a clear idea of what it is fighting for, not simply

what it is fighting against. And it must agree what the best tactics are to use and that everyone in the group will use follow the agreed tactics. This will be discussed at length later.

Money

In order to function an organisation needs a paper, leaflets, rooms to meet in, money for mail-outs and a dozen other items that require lots of the green stuff. Ways of tackling this requirement include:

- Ignoring it - Which means things only take place if someone is willing to fund them out of their own pocket. This is pretty common but of course results in things not getting done. It also gives the funder undue influence.
- Use 'criminal' means to raise money - This sometimes happens but is generally not a good move as sooner or later people get caught and end up in prison or worse. What's more if you come under any sort of police investigation it will rapidly become apparent that your getting funds from some dodgy source which will in itself attract further investigation. It also gives the state a good excuse for a 'non-political' clamp down.
- Organise fund raisers - Although this can work well for special purchases, like say a printing press if its used for regular bills (printing, rent etc.) it soon turns into a massive drag and waste of resources. You can spend half of the time discussing gigs etc. which is off-putting.
- Membership levy/subs - This is what many groups use. For example members contribute 5% of their gross income on a weekly or monthly basis. A percentage system is fairer than a flat rate as an unemployed member (on £100 a week) pays £5 whereas someone working and earning £500 a week pays at least £25. This gives an income to pay for a paper, magazine, leaflets, rooms and even to subsidise travel to demos for unemployed members. Of course it also has a negative effect on the first requirement - people - as some people may be unwilling to loose the equivalent of a couple of beers a week. Which brings us to the fourth requirement - commitment. [Read more about financing your group](#)

Commitment

The amount of work you do and the amount of money you're willing to put in depends on you feeling good about the organisation. It is adversely affected if you feel you are being used, or that other people are not willing to contribute their share. That much is obvious. However it's also true that your commitment will be dependant on how much you agree with what the group is doing/saying and whether the group seems to be going somewhere or just treading water. It's easy to keep people around when lots of stuff is happening, the difficult thing is the periods in between bursts of activity.

Some favour a high commitment oriented group over a 'as many people as possible' one. With time the high commitment group can come to involve a lot of people where as often the reverse is not true. Enough background, here's some concrete ideas.

Find another four or five people that are willing to do something serious. You may know this many already if not get an address you can print on leaflets and start leafleting demo's etc. with anarchist stuff. Get a flag or a banner together. Maybe call a public meeting on a relevant issue see who turns up.

Once you get your four or five people be prepared to spend a couple of years getting your act together before you start to expand. Agree on a membership levy and conditions of membership. Write down agreed perspectives and strategy for promoting anarchism and getting involved in activity. Start publishing a regular paper arguing these ideas. Sell it through bookshops, campaign meetings and demos. Get involved around struggles and develop respect for your group as good activists and people with good ideas. Don't concentrate on talking to anarchists, concentrate on talking to activists. Find out about the

national groups and travel to nearby demos/ conferences. Make a banner you can bring on marches.

Above all you need to be patient. A big problem is the 'revolution next year' syndrome where you hype yourself up to expecting a lot and then get disappointed when it does not materialise. Work out where you are going but be prepared to go there slowly, as I said above its likely to be two years before you get any serious return on your work.

libcom.org 2005

This text is adapted from [The Struggle Site](#).

Basic principles of revolutionary organisation



A brief outline of basic points of agreement which we think are the minimum necessary to be the basis of potentially productive pro-revolutionary organisation.

Communist: We are against all forms of [capitalism](#) whether private, state or self-managed. In its place we want a classless, stateless and [moneyless](#) society based on solidarity, co-operation and the principle 'from each according to ability, to each according to need' - a [libertarian communist](#) society.

Class struggle: Capitalism is characterised by the creation of a [class](#) of people, dispossessed from the means of production and subsistence, who are required to work for a wage to get by. This condition pushes us to resist - to do less work, for more money. However, our employers want us to work more for less money to increase their profits. The struggle resulting from this contradiction sets our human needs and desires against those of capital. This struggle also lays the foundations for a new kind of society, based on the fulfilment of our needs. Opposing all discrimination and prejudice like [sexism](#) and [racism](#) by attempting to unite the working class is just as much a part of class struggle as striking for higher wages.

[Direct action](#) and solidarity are the basis of working class strength. We support the actions of our class in our own interests. We are opposed to all those who claim to be our representatives, like the [trade unions](#) or political parties which seek to manage capitalism supposedly on our behalf.

Internationalist: Our class is global and so should be our solidarity. We oppose all nationalist movements, whether openly conservative or supposedly progressive and ‘anti-imperialist’ in nature as both are based on the unity of workers with their rulers. We never take sides in wars between states or would-be states, instead always supporting mutiny, fraternisation and the working class fighting in its own interest.

Everyday life: Whether waged or unwaged, it is our everyday activity as workers that reproduces capitalist society. And it is through disrupting this activity that we can challenge and eventually replace it. As such, our activity as radical workers should always be based primarily on issues rooted in our everyday lives and experiences.

Organisations should feel free to use or adapt these to your own purposes.

Coming up with a strategy and set of principles



Advice and information on devising a basic political and strategic programme for your organisation.

If you are going to be involved in struggles as an organisation (rather than a loose collection of individuals), and you want to have an influence on them that you will then need to act in unity. To do this you need to agree what it is you are fighting for and what tactics you think that struggle or movement should be using.

Furthermore, over the course of the last 150 years of working class struggles, many lessons can be learned about what sort of ideas and strategies have failed and which have been successful. It is important to learn these lessons and distil them into the theoretical foundation of your organisation, so that you don't end up repeating the mistakes of the past.

We recommend, therefore, coming up with a basic set of aims and principles to your organisation which briefly and clearly outline your understanding of the world and how you believe you can go about changing it.

Some find the best way of putting this together is to start by a process of education and discussion around some key issues or historical lessons and then move onto creating written policy that can be debated, amended and if necessary voted on point by point. We have a sample [basic set of aims and principles for revolutionary organisations here](#), which you could use as a model to work from.

The big advantage of this method is that once things are written down in this way it becomes very clear what exactly has been decided. But it should be understood that these positions should never be seen as 'the end' of a particular debate. They don't represent perfection but

rather the best collective understanding and tactics the organisation could generate at that particular time. They should always be open to further debate and amendment as circumstances and knowledge changes. Although it is a good idea to limit major modifications to national conferences so when there is a lot of disagreement you don't end up doing anything but amending position papers!

You'll also want to work out how much agreement you will expect new members to have with the aims and principles before they join. You could consider having a "supporter status" for your organisation so that sympathetic individuals can get involved even though there has not been time to educate them sufficiently on the intricacies of your ideas.

libcom.org 2010

Decision making and organisational form



An essay about different methods of organising for political groups, discussing the merits and downfalls of using consensus, chairs, majority voting and more.

"Consensus" has had a certain popularity as a decision-making method among social change groups since the '60s, especially within the anti-nuclear movement but also in anarchist and radical feminist circles. I think we can understand why if we consider what sorts of organisations exist in this country. Mass organisations in which the membership directly shape the decisions are hard to find. How often have members been ruled "out of order" at union meetings by an entrenched official? Most leftist political groups also have a top-down concept of organisation, as befits their preoccupation with "leadership."

On the other hand, this sort of alienation and lack of control appears absent in activities organised through small circles of acquaintances. Those who engage in an action together typically reached a common agreement after talking it over informally. This leads to the model of the small, informal group -- no written constitution, no chair of meetings, no elections for delegated tasks, no careful definition of jobs, no written minutes of meetings. Decisions are made by having an unstructured discussion until consensus is reached.

But informality does not eliminate hierarchy in organisations; it merely masks it. To the insiders, everything appears friendly and egalitarian. But newcomers do not have the same longstanding ties to the group. And having no clear definition of responsibilities, and no elections of individuals who carry out important tasks, makes it more difficult for the membership to control what goes on.

Fortunately, the "small, informal group" is not the only alternative to the dominant hierarchical model of organisation. It is possible to build a formal organisation that is directly controlled by its membership. Being "formal" merely means that the organisation has a

written set of rules about how decisions are made, and duties of officers and conditions of membership are clearly defined. An organisation does not have to be top-down in order to be "formal" in this sense. A libertarian organisation would have a constitution that explicitly lays out a non-hierarchical way of making decisions.

Delegating responsibilities

Sometimes people have the idea that setting up elected positions with defined responsibilities is a "hierarchy," as if any delegation of responsibility creates a boss. Yet, informality does not avoid delegation since some people will inevitably do tasks on behalf of the group, such as answering correspondence or handling a bank account.

It is possible to elect people to perform delegated tasks without creating a top-down organisation. Here are a few guidelines:

- The scope of authority of an elected position, such as correspondence secretary or treasurer, should be explicitly defined and delimited, so that everyone knows what this person should be doing, and with the requirement of regular reports to keep the membership informed.
- The person should be elected for a limited term, such as one year, and should be subject to recall at any time by majority vote of the membership (but with a requirement of adequate notice to ensure that this is not "sprung" all of a sudden by those members least favourable to the person currently doing the job).
- If at all feasible, there should be a requirement of mandatory rotation from office. This is especially important for any position of acting as spokesperson or representative of an organisation or body of people. If an organisation is very small, however, it is sometimes difficult to rotate responsibilities. Even so, the person carrying out responsibilities can report regularly to membership meetings and can be thus directed by decisions of the membership.
- Nobody is to be elected to set policy for the organisation, but only to carry out those responsibilities that have been assigned by the membership. The general membership meeting of the organisation must remain the supreme decision-making body and can over-rule any decisions of elected officers.

The idea is that the main decision-making responsibility of the organisation is not to be delegated to some "steering committee" or executive but is conducted directly by the membership through their own discussions and votes; this is the heart of the libertarian concept of organisation.

Since many authoritarian leftists define social change in terms of putting a particular leadership into power -- such as the Leninist concept of "the revolutionary party taking state power" -- it is no surprise that even organisations formed, or influenced, by authoritarian leftists may have a hierarchical set-up where the power to make decisions is concentrated in some executive board or steering committee. While libertarians oppose this practice, and pose the alternative of direct decision-making by the members or rank-and-file participants, it is, nonetheless, not necessary to oppose all delegation of tasks or responsibilities.

The real question should be, "What is the relationship between those vested with responsibilities and the rest of the membership?" If the centre of decision-making lies in the general meetings, and those with responsibilities must report to these meetings, and are instructed by them, and (where possible) jobs are rotated, then we do not have a top-down structure, but an organisation where decision-making is from the bottom up.

A chair is not a boss

Often people who favour the "small, informal group" model of organisation also oppose the practice of electing someone to chair a meeting, even if the meeting is a larger gathering. It is easy to understand what they are afraid of. Consider union meetings where the chair is a paid

official. He has certain entrenched interests to defend. To serve his ends, he may rule "out of order" motions from the floor on matters of concern to the rank and file, or manipulate the meeting in other ways.

But here the problem is that there is an entrenched bureaucracy; chairing meetings is only one of the ways they control the organisation. The situation is different if the chair is elected at the beginning of the meeting by those present, and if the chair can be removed by majority vote at any time. Being chair of a meeting does not convert someone into a bureaucrat.

I've sat through chairless meetings where people interrupt each other, voices get louder as people try to express themselves, discussions get side-tracked into numerous tangents, and important decisions are put off or hurriedly decided at the last minute. This experience has made me rather frustrated with the prejudice against having a chair of meetings.

If a meeting only consists of a few people, then obviously it does not need to have a chair. But once meetings achieve a certain size, a chair becomes necessary in order to ensure that the meeting stays on track and moves through the agenda in a reasonable amount of time, while making sure that people have an opportunity to speak.

I've heard opponents of chairmanship argue, "It's the responsibility of each individual to make sure that the meeting stays on track and individuals don't get out of hand." But even with the best of intentions, this is difficult to achieve in practice. When you're thinking about what you want to say next, it's hard to also be keeping track of whose turn it is to speak and of what the agenda is.

The rationale behind having a chair is that we delegate to one person the responsibility to concentrate on such things as the agenda and the order of speakers while the rest of us are free to concentrate on what is being said. Of course, it can happen that a chair is manipulative, favouring one particular "side" in a matter under dispute. But in such a situation, a motion to replace the chair would be in order.

The right to disassociate

In working out a libertarian concept of organisation, we need to remember that the individual members not only have rights that must be respected by the organisation, they also have obligations to the rest of the membership. Since the majority have the right to control their own organisation, individuals must conduct themselves so as to respect this right of the majority.

For example, if an individual makes public statements that claim to speak for the organisation, but state only the viewpoint of the individual, not a viewpoint actually discussed and agreed to by the majority, then that individual is acting irresponsibly and anti-democratically.

There is, however, no reason why an individual should be required to stay mum publicly about disagreements within the organisation. As long as the individual makes clear that the stated viewpoint is his or her own, public disagreement with the position of the organisation is not irresponsible.

A libertarian concept of organisation must allow for diversity of opinions. This means that members must try to maintain a climate of respecting the opinions of others in the organisation. But what happens when members do not respect the rights of others? What happens when members are threatening to others, or conduct themselves in ways that are very disruptive to the life of an organisation? In such a case the majority may have to consider disassociating themselves from that individual. In other words, the rights of the majority include the right to expel individual members.

To some anarchists, expulsions are always a "purge." The authoritarian connotation of the latter term are meant to suggest that any expulsion is a violation of freedom, an illegitimate act. But the position of these anarchists is actually self-contradictory. For, it is a very basic libertarian principle that the membership of an organisation have the right to directly control it. And this means that no individual has the "right" to act in ways that prevent the majority from accomplishing the purposes for which they got together. If the majority in an organisation did not have the right to expel disruptive individuals, this would mean that they couldn't control the conditions of membership and direction of that organisation. Freedom of association implies the freedom to disassociate.

On the other hand, the power to expel members should never be delegated to officials. For, if elected officers can expel members on their own, they can expel critics of how they are conducting their responsibilities. Expulsion certainly is used by officials in hierarchical organisations as a means of maintaining their top-down control. What is illegitimate in such cases is not the act of expulsion in itself, but the top-down way it is carried out.

The point here is that individuals have obligations to the other members of an organisation. And the majority have the right to ensure that the responsibilities of membership are observed. But expulsion is a last resort, and should not be used lightly. Expulsion is something that the membership should decide on directly, in a general membership meeting or convention. And it should always be required that accused individuals be given advance notice and have the right to defend themselves before the general membership prior to a vote to expel.

Talking until agreement is reached

The partisans of informality also tend to be averse to voting as a way of making decisions. They prefer the process of talking until agreement is reached (or not reached). In my experience, this process tends to encourage informal hierarchy. That's because this process tends to heighten the influence of the more articulate and self-confident individuals, and tends to disenfranchise the shy newcomer, and the less articulate. Voting has the advantage that it is an equaliser. The shy and the aggressive, the articulate and the not-so-articulate, all can raise their hands, and each has only one vote.

Advocates of consensus sometimes say that hierarchical organisation is the only alternative to consensus. But there is also the alternative of direct democracy where decisions are made by majority vote. Direct voting by the members puts the majority of members in control, and control by the majority of members is the opposite of hierarchy. In a hierarchical organisation, it is not the majority of members who are in charge but a few leaders at the top -- that is what "hierarchy" means.

The libertarian idea of direct, democratic voting is quite different than the official concept of "democracy" in this society. "Democratic voting" typically means electing officials who then have all the power of making decisions. But that is really elective autocracy, not genuine democracy, which requires direct decision-making by the rank and file.

Formal consensus

Though "talking until agreement is reached" is the natural method of decision-making for "small, informal groups," not all advocates of consensus decision-making are averse to formal organisation. However, making the organisation formal -- a written constitution, definition of membership and so on -- does not eliminate the basic problems of the consensus process.

The requirement of unanimity means that disagreements have to be talked out until verbal consensus emerges. This means that even a formal consensus system tends to heighten the

influence of the more talkative, self-confident participants. Also, the requirement of consensus often leads to prolonged, marathon sessions, or meetings where nothing is decided.

This aspect of consensus tends to make the movement less conducive to participation by working people, and tends to reduce participation to the hard-core activists. When people have other demands on their time (job, children, spouse), they will tend to be frustrated by meetings that are unnecessarily long, indecisive, or chaotic. Most people will want to have some sense that something will be accomplished, a clear decision made, and in a reasonable amount of time.

In his pamphlet Blocking Progress, Howard Ryan describes a nightmarish example of what can happen with consensus.(1) Many people in the Livermore Action Group -- an anti-nuclear action group here in the Bay Area -- were uncomfortable with the first point of LAG's action guidelines which stated: "Our attitude will be one of openness, friendliness and respect toward all people we encounter." "A common sentiment", Ryan points out, "was that oppressed people often do not feel these things towards police or authorities and should not be required to feel them in order to join the [Lawrence-Livermore Laboratory] blockade." In 1982 there was a month-long discussion of this issue, followed by two full days of informal open debate. At the second of these assemblies it was proposed to replace the "friendly and respectful" language with "non-violent."

Coming towards the end of this long process of discussion, there was a suggestion by one of the participants in the second meeting that a straw poll be taken to determine the general opinion in the room. This was itself considered so controversial that two hours were consumed in debating whether it was even okay to take a straw poll. Finally a poll was taken and the vote was 74 to 2 in favour of changing the non-violence code to remove the "respectful and friendly" language. One of the participants has described what then took place:

One of the two people [a doctrinaire pacifist] blocked it. He was asked repeatedly to stand aside, to leave, to die. People were just so upset. He wouldn't budge and it was blocked.

This is a good example of the elitist coercion that consensus permits.

Consensus is anti-democratic

The requirement of unanimity is anti-democratic. A small minority does not have the right to prevent the majority of members from doing what they want to do. Organisations are not of value in themselves but only as a vehicle for cooperation and collective activity. Insofar as consensus thwarts the majority from doing what it wants, it makes the organisation an ineffective vehicle for them. This can lead to splits and fragmentation -- exactly the result that the advocates of consensus say they want to avoid.

The rules of an organisation can -- and must -- protect the rights of individuals and minorities. If one studies the situation in the AFL-CIO-type unions, and major political organisations, it is true that the rights of individuals and political minorities are often in a sorry state. But these are hierarchical organisations. It is the hierarchy, not "majority voting," that is the problem.

Anarchists of the more individualistic persuasion argue that consensus is necessary to avoid "tyranny of the majority." But where in the real world does the majority have real power? The real tyrannies that people are fighting around the world are tyrannies of entrenched minorities, of governments and bosses. I don't want to claim that "majorities are always right" but I do believe that people have the right to make their own mistakes. The issue here is whether people have the right to control their own movements and organisations. To give a

single individual or small minority the right of veto on decisions is to have a system of minority rule.

Even when individuals or minorities do not actually threaten or use a block to keep the majority from doing what it wants, everyone is aware that they could, if the organisation is run by consensus. The structural requirement of unanimity puts pressure on the majority to placate small minorities in order to accomplish something. Often this leads to decisions that paper over disagreements and leave everyone dissatisfied.

Rudy Perkins has described this problem, based on his experience in the Clamshell Alliance in New England in the late '70s:

Majority rule is disliked because amongst the two, three or many courses of action proposed, only one is chosen; the rest are "defeated." Consensus theoretically accommodates everyone's ideas. In practice this often led to:

- a watered down, lowest-common-denominator solution, or
- the victory of one proposal through intimidation or acquiescence, or
- the creation of a vague proposal to placate everyone, while the plan of one side or another was actually implemented through committees or office staff.

In other words, within the anti-nuclear movement ideas are in competition and some do win, but under consensus the act of choosing between alternatives is usually disguised. Because the process is often one of mystification and subterfuge, it takes power of conscious decision away from the organisation's membership.(2)

Consensus puts pressure on minorities not to express misgivings or disagreements because their dissent would prevent the organisation from making a decision. Thus it actually becomes harder for minorities to state dissenting opinions because dissent is always a disruptive act. When decisions are made by majority vote, on the other hand, there is not this heavy "cost" to dissent and minorities can freely state their disagreement without thereby disrupting or blocking the organisation from reaching a decision.

Consensus also means that it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to change an organisation's orientation even when it is clear to most members that the current direction is failing. That's because there will almost always be a minority who will be against change, because the current direction of the organisation may have been what attracted them to it, or because they may simply prefer what they are used to.

Simple majority

"Simple majority" is the requirement of one vote more than half the votes cast in order to make a decision. A simple majority is the smallest number of votes needed to guarantee that a decision is made.(3)

Advocates of simple majority sometimes hear the retort: "But do we want to have a major decision made with 51% for 49% against?" Decisions that organisations make in the course of conducting their affairs vary a lot in their relative importance to the participants. For some decisions, a narrow majority won't matter because those who voted "no" may not have really strong feelings one way or the other. If it is an important issue, though, it is clearly a problem if an organisation is closely split.

Sometimes, in organisations that are based on membership participation and democratic voting, close votes will lead the group to stop and reconsider the issue in order to find a proposal that accommodates objections.

More often, this process happens before it reaches a vote. When it becomes clear in the course of the discussion on a proposal that the membership are closely divided and have

strong feelings on the issue, there is likely to be an effort to find a proposal that mitigates objections. For one thing, it is to the advantage of the proposal's partisans to have as much support as possible within the organisation. The work of the organisation is bound to suffer if it is badly split -- dissatisfied members may drag their feet or drop out.

When a union conducts a strike vote, for example, the partisans of a strike will want to get the largest possible majority for a strike. If the vote for a strike isn't overwhelming, if there is only a narrow majority for striking, the union will be less likely to actually go out because the division among the workforce undermines the chances of winning a strike.

Such considerations have at times led people to propose decision-making based on larger majorities, such as two-thirds or three-fourths. But the problem with this is that most of the decisions that organisations make are not so crucial that large majorities are needed.

Moreover, stipulating a majority larger than 50% plus one means that decisions can be blocked by minorities. Though the minorities required to "block" a majority are larger than under consensus, this still permits minority control. A cohesive minority could exercise undue influence on a group due to its potential for blocking what the majority wants. Thus the arguments against consensus also apply to some extent against a formal requirement of two-thirds or three-fourths majority. The advantage to "simple majority" as a decision-making method is that it is the only way to formally preclude minority rule.

There may be circumstances when it would be desirable to have a larger majority than 50% plus one -- as in those cases where the organisation is closely split on important issues. But instead of trying to make a formal rule for this, I think this should be dealt with by the membership using good sense in such situations. Not everything that is desirable for an organisation can be created by formal rules.

The conditions required for the healthy and democratic functioning of an organisation go beyond the formal rules. Whether the rights of members are respected also depends on the climate in the organisation. How people treat each other is an informal factor but it is just as important as clauses in constitutions.

There is usually some sort of underlying, informal consensus in almost any organisation. To take an obvious example, there needs to be a consensus that disagreements are not settled by punching someone out. So, there does need to be a consensus on some things, on certain basic assumptions that underlie the unity of the organisation. The advocates of "consensus decision-making" are correct in perceiving this, but where they go wrong is in trying to elevate this into a general principle of decision-making so that everything requires a consensus. The consensus system puts day-to-day decisions, on the one hand, and the most important decisions, fundamental purposes and ways of treating each other, on the other hand, all on the same level.

Small groups, no power

However, consensus does often work reasonably well in small groups, especially where the participants have a common background and shared assumptions. Some people might maintain that small, independent groups are all that is needed.

Indeed, some partisans of the small group have argued that "bigness" inevitably brings bureaucracy in movements and that only small, independent groups can be genuinely controlled by their members. This ignores the methods that libertarians have developed for avoiding top-down control in mass organisations (such as the guidelines I mentioned earlier), and the examples of libertarian mass unions that functioned through assemblies, without an entrenched bureaucracy; organisations like the Industrial Workers of the World back in the '10s or the Spanish National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in the '30s.

If the "bigness means bureaucracy" dogma were true, a libertarian society would be impossible. To have a society organised along anarchist lines means that there must be a means by which the whole populace can participate in making crucial decisions affecting society as a whole. For this to happen it must be possible to have large organisations, organisations spanning vast areas, such as the North American continent, that are able to function in a non-hierarchical way, directly controlled by their rank and file participants.

If the whole society could be organised to make decisions through direct democracy and mass participation, as anarchists advocate, then surely it must be possible for people to build mass organisations that are run this way today. If not, then how could a libertarian society be brought into existence? Only a mass movement that is itself organised non-hierarchically could create a society free of top-down, bureaucratic, exploitative social relations.

This brings us to the clearest problem with the "small groups" doctrine: Small groups have no power. The power to change society requires a mass movement, and the development of solidarity among working people on a large scale. To unite people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, to coalesce the various groups into a real movement, to pool resources, mass organisations are needed. In the absence of a larger movement, small groups can be discouraged by their own lack of resources and sense of isolation.

Unless working people can organise their solidarity into mass organisations, they will not be able to develop the power to challenge our very powerful adversaries -- the corporations and their government. Without a mass movement, most people will not develop a sense that they have the power to change society. Our ideal of social change in the direction of democratic participation and workers control will appear to most people as merely a "nice idea, but impractical." Only the strength of a mass movement can convince the majority that our vision of a society run by working people is feasible.

Footnotes

1. Howard Ryan, [Blocking Progress: Consensus Decision Making in the Anti-Nuclear Movement, 1983](#), published by the Overthrow Cluster of the Livermore Action Group. Ryan's pamphlet makes a number of the same arguments against consensus that I am making here.
2. Rudy Perkins, "Breaking with Libertarian Dogma: Lessons from the Anti-Nuclear Struggle," Black Rose, Fall 1979, p. 15.
3. If we were to allow a decision to be made when half vote for a proposal, then it might happen that half vote for proposal A and half vote for proposal B. And what if A and B are conflicting proposals? Requiring one vote more than half guarantees that a single solution is decided upon.

libcom.org 2005

*This text is adapted from Tom Wetzel's original article entitled *On Organisation*.*

Financing a group



Finance is one of the most essential things to get right when setting up a group. This article highlights some basic finance strategies and argues that the best method to use a system based on a membership subscription.

Subscription membership is where all members are required to contribute a percentage of their (gross) income on a weekly or monthly basis. A percentage system is fairer than a flat rate as an unemployed member (on £100 a week) pays £5 whereas someone working and earning £500 a week pays at least £25.

In richer countries this should provide enough money to run an organisation without the need for additional fund raising for routine use. However in serious organisations outside of the richer world it is not unusual for members of a small group to have to donate much larger percentages of their income in order to keep their group functioning! For this reason if you are in the richer world you might like to set aside a percentage of the group's income as an international solidarity fund.

Each local section of the group will need a treasurer to keep track of the payment of subs and to keep track and account for any expenditure by the local section. These accounts should be available for any member to inspect although in terms of income you might want to decide that while individual subs should be listed no name should be attached to each item. This is essential as suspicion over the misuse of funds can easily destroy a group.

On a regional/national basis National conference should decide that a certain percentage of each branch's income (perhaps 50%) should go to a national account and supervised by a national treasurer. This national account can be used to pay for national expenditure (printing of papers, books etc), perhaps helping small branches with low income/unemployed members to carry out regular activity, and helping individual branches faced with local opportunities to make the most of them. Again these accounts should be open to inspection by all members and a summary listing major items should be regularly circulated to all members.

libcom.org 2005

Adapted from the Struggle Site.

Handling difficult behaviour in meetings



This guide covers some typical behaviour types a facilitator may come across in group or campaign meetings. We list the behaviour type, suggest a reason and some solutions to tackle the problem.

The heckler

One of the most common behaviours, the heckler is often aggressive, argumentative and gets satisfaction from provoking others. First off don't let him or her upset you - stay calm. Try to find merit in one of his/her points; express your agreement, and then move on to something else.

The one who won't shut up

Overly talkative often fall into one of four categories: an "eager-beaver"; a show-off; someone very well-informed who is eager to use their knowledge; someone just plain talkative. Some ideas to try and deal with this kind of person include, waiting until he/she takes a breath; then thank him/her and say something like "Lets hear from someone else." Try slowing the person down with a difficult question. If he/she makes an obvious misstatement of facts, toss the comment back to the group and let them correct the person. In general, let the group take care of him/her as much as possible, but often as a facilitator you will need to cut the talkative person short in their ramblings and move the discussion on.

The cynic

The cynic may have a particular problem with a certain issue, or may just gripe at random, for the sake of complaining. In some cases they may have a legitimate complaint. To try and make the meeting more useful try to point out that the purpose of the meeting is to find better ways to do things by constructive cooperation. In some cases, it may help to have a member of the group answer instead of you.

The silent one

People who don't talk in meetings may be bored, feel themselves superior to what's being discussed or maybe timid, shy or uncertain. While obviously its more productive if everyone chips in their opinion its worth remembering that if someone doesn't want to speak (for example at their first meeting) you shouldn't force them. Some things you could do to get quiet people talking are: arousing interest by asking directly for his/her opinion, asking for his/her view after indicating respect for his/her experience (but don't overdo this!) or compliment or encourage him/her the first time he/she talks. But most importantly work to foster a non-intimidatory atmosphere in meetings where everyone feels equal and valued.

The egos

It's not always that debates get to heated or the people are egoists, sometimes people's personality's just clash and they don't get along. To calm things down try to compliment the individuals on their enthusiasm and participation, but ask them to focus on constructive solutions. Emphasise points they agree on. Work to bring the rest of the group back into discussion, by throwing them a question to balance things out.

The chatty couple

People having side conversations can sometimes be a problem in meetings, they may be commenting on the discussion, or may be having a personal conversation. Try reminding the person what you are meant to be doing, pointing out that there is a debate going on etc. You could try drawing them back into the meeting by asking an easy question and recapping what has just been discussed.

The one who is defiantly wrong

If what someone is saying is totally incorrect they may be confused about the issue or could have been misinformed. Tactfully restate what they were saying to try and show how it may be incorrect, or acknowledge their contribution but leave the debate open so as someone else in the group can provide correct information.

libcom.org 2005

This text is adapted from the original by the uhc-collective.

How to organise and facilitate meetings effectively



Advice and tips on how to organise meetings which fulfil their purpose efficiently.

One thing central to any functional group is regular meetings. In a healthy organisation almost all decisions will be made at these meetings and there will be a sufficient level of discussion to ensure all those attending have a good idea of the activity and arguments in the different struggles the organisation is involved in. Meetings might also have some time given over to education.

Before the meeting

Make sure everyone knows the time and place

A new group or one engaged in a lot of activity should meet at least once a week, at the same time and day. It helps to establish a consistent meeting day, time and location, as soon as possible so people can make it a habit. If they have to search for you or keep track of an ever-changing meeting time, they're far more likely to forget or not to bother. You'll want a space

that's private enough for you to have strong disagreements in and where only the members of the group will be while you are using it. This could mean a private room in a quiet pub that would be glad for the additional customers on quiet nights!

Develop an agenda

An agenda gives people time to plan, to think over things that will be discussed, to do assignments and bring necessary information and materials. It doesn't have to be set in stone - you can always add and adjust as needed, even during the meeting.

The agenda can be printed and distributed, either in advance or at the meeting. Or, it can be written on a chalkboard or whiteboard where everyone can see it. This helps keep people on topic and lets them know what will be covered and when. If its known who is chairing the meeting in advance it may be a good idea for that person to start the meeting with a suggested agenda.

An agenda should include all of the following items that apply to your group:

1. Additions and approval of the agenda,
2. Reading, corrections, and approval of the previous meeting's minutes,
3. Announcements and correspondence to be dealt with,
4. Treasurer's report,
5. Committee reports,
6. Unfinished business (issues left over from previous meetings),
7. New business.

If there is any disagreement over the order of the agenda then this should be quickly discussed and voted on at the start of the meeting. If the chair thinks there is a lot to get through it may make sense to set a maximum amount of time that can be spent discussing particular topics right at the start of the meeting.

Make sure the room is open and set up properly

Have you ever arrived at a meeting only to find the door locked, and everyone had to stand around waiting while the facilitator scrambled to find the key? Or have you ever been in a meeting where there weren't enough chairs, and each time a latecomer arrived, they had to interrupt and search for one and move it in? Not especially effective ways of inspiring confidence and credibility or getting things done efficiently, are they? Try and arrange the room so that everyone sits in a circle and make sure you are seated where you can see everyone.

During the meeting

Start as you mean to continue

Make sure you start on time. This is especially important for newcomers, who can get a bit put-off by the meeting start time being increasingly pushed back while people chat or wander around. First thing to do is make sure everyone knows who everyone else is. As clichéd as it may be - have a 'go-round' and get people to say their names and maybe a bit of other info about themselves. Next up make sure someone has volunteered to facilitate the meeting (who will have the agenda, and make sure the meeting flows smoothly) and someone else is taking decent notes of the meeting. Its important that the same people don't end up doing these tasks every meeting, perhaps the best way to tackle this is to have a list of everyone willing to chair and each week take the next person on the list.

Minute taking

Someone should be responsible every week for keeping minutes of the meeting and preparing these to be read at or distributed before the next meeting. Minutes need not be very detailed (you don't need to write down what everyone says). They should aim to include:

1. Who attended the meeting,

2. Topics discussed,
3. Decisions reached for each topic,
4. Who has volunteered to do what,
5. Items to be discussed at next meeting (and when that will be). [Read more on taking minutes](#)

Encourage group discussion to get all points of view

Turn questions back to the group for their input. Ask people to comment on something just said. Compliment people on their ideas and thank them for their input. Ask open-ended questions. You may need to ask the more quiet people for their thoughts, and tactfully interrupt the longwinded ones to move the discussion along. Encourage people who just want to agree with a previous speaker to say "ditto" rather than taking the time to repeat her/his point.

Stay on top of things

It's part of your job as facilitator to manage the traffic and help the discussion move along. If several people are trying to talk at once, ask them to take turns. It helps to have a pen and paper to hand for when things get busy- jot down people's names in the order they raised their hands. It can be a good idea to let people who have not spoken yet to skip the queue and put them at the top of your list. Make sure everyone gets their turn and things keep moving - you might have to start asking some people to keep it short! Often a discussion can become dominated by a couple of speakers, try and avoid this situation by inviting the rest of the people to contribute (going round in a circle and asking for people's views can help).

If the discussion is getting off-topic (i.e. it strays from the agenda), point this out and redirect it back on course. If someone is getting hostile, argumentative, or needlessly negative, tactfully intervene and try to turn the discussion in a more constructive direction. If necessary, ask the group to agree to a time limit on a discussion that might take too long. You might want to agree to limit each speaker's time, or say that no one can speak a second time until everyone has spoken once.

If the group is spinning its wheels and people are only repeating themselves, restate and summarise the issues and ask if people are near ready to make a decision on the subject. If it just doesn't seem that the group can make a good decision right now, suggest tabling the matter until another time. You may want to ask someone to bring back more information, or form a committee to work on the issue.

Don't use your position as facilitator to impose your personal ideas and opinions on the group

If you have strong feelings on a particular issue, you may want to step aside and let someone else facilitate that discussion. At the very least, keep your own comments to a minimum, try to let others speak first, and identify them as your personal beliefs, outside of your role as facilitator. Avoid criticising the ideas of others - your position gives your comments undue extra weight.

Non-verbals are important, too

Be attentive to people who are speaking - look at them, lean forward, smile, nod. Make eye contact with people who may need encouragement to speak. Pay attention - people who are less confident about speaking will often indicate that they want to speak in minor way (e.g. briefly half put up their hand). A good chair will spot this and encourage them to speak

Don't be afraid of silence

It's a very useful tool. It gives people a chance to consider and collect their thoughts. It may encourage someone to voice a comment they've been thinking about but hesitant to say.

Guide the discussion toward closure

Restate people's comments to make sure everyone understands their point. Ask for clarification. Summarise what has been accomplished or agreed and what is left to resolve. Suggest when it's time to wrap up and make decisions or take action.

Decision making

Arguments about how best to reach decisions are fundamental to anarchism. You may wish to leave time for discussion in the hope of being able to reach consensus, only then moving to a vote, or you may wish to go straight to the vote. If time permits it may make sense to postpone making a contentious decision to the next meeting to give people a chance to think things over (and calm down!). [Read more on decision making](#)

Take time at the end of the meeting to process

Reflect on what went well and what people appreciate about others' input and actions. Check out assumptions. Encourage people to share any lingering concerns or things that just don't sit right.

End on time

Nothing makes people dread and avoid meetings more than knowing they're likely to go on and on and consume far more of their time than they want to give. Set a time to end the meeting at the very beginning and stick to it!

After the meeting

Minutes

Make sure the minutes will be written up, organised and then distributed among those who attended within a reasonable time scale.

Follow up with people.

Thank them for their input. Make sure they understand assignments and have what they need to do them.

Now you're done you can start getting ready for the next meeting!

libcom.org 2005

This text is adapted from work by Mary McGhee and The Struggle Site.

Successful delegation guide



Tips and advice on delegating tasks to different people.

1. Be specific...

It's easy to give someone a vague assignment ("You take care of publicity") only to find out later that what they understood this to mean is very different from what you intended. People

need to know what tasks they're responsible for and what the finished product should look like. Example: "Prepare a press release and send it to the local newspapers, TV and radio one month before the event."

2. ...but don't micromanage

Tell them enough so they understand what's expected of them, but not so much that they have no chance to think for themselves. Leaving the person room to make some independent decisions lets them choose a style of doing things that suits them best. It makes them feel respected and trusted and part of the team. It builds a greater sense of pride and ownership in the project, and it gives them a chance to develop their skills and confidence. They might not do the outstanding job that you think you would have, but it might still be good enough--and the benefits to the person doing it are probably worth the tradeoff. So learn to let go!

3. Agree on deadlines

Make sure the person understands when they can expect things they need from other people, when their part of the task needs to be done, and how this fits in with the larger timeline for the whole project.

4. Follow up

Check back with the person you've delegated to, to find out how it's going. Ask if any questions have come up since you last talked. Make sure they have what they need to do the job, and that they're getting the necessary assistance and cooperation from others. Sometimes people are reluctant to admit they didn't understand something, or that they're having trouble. Asking gives them an opening and permission to say so. It's also a way of finding out if someone simply isn't doing the job, before it's too late.

5. Match assignments with people's skills...

Some people write well, but hate to talk on the phone. Some people can schmooze anything out of anybody, while others would rather do anything besides ask for donations. Find out what people are good at, and what they like to do, and make the most of it.

6. ...but don't let people get typecast against their will

People with particular skills (artistic, computer, etc.) often get stuck with the same jobs over and over, because they do them so well. If they like it that way, that may be fine (although you might want to encourage them to stretch a bit and do something unfamiliar once in a while). But they may be more than ready for a change--and someone else may be just waiting for a chance to do "their" job.

7. Make sure assignments get handed out fairly and realistically

Most groups have at least one workhorse who tends to take on too much--sometimes to the point of exhaustion and burnout. Another problem is the person who gets carried away with the enthusiasm of a moment and volunteers for things, then finds her/himself unable to follow through. Encourage people to take a realistic look at their workload and abilities, and to take on the jobs they can reasonably handle.

8. Give accurate and honest feedback

People want to know how they're doing, and they deserve your honest opinion. Praise effort and good work, but also let them know where they might have done better. Encourage risk-taking and growth by treating mistakes and less-than-successful efforts as a chance to learn and do better next time.

Taking meeting minutes guide



A guide to taking minutes of meetings effectively, to record and monitor your decisions and activities and keep people informed.

Minutes of meetings form a historical record of a group's work. They serve as a record of decisions and details when people's memories fail or when they disagree. They remind people of assignments they've taken on and deadlines they need to meet. They inform those not present of what happened at the meeting. They give future members of the organisation a way to build on past successes and avoid reinventing the wheel.

Some groups designate one person to take the minutes at every meeting; others rotate the job. Do what works best for your group, as long as the information gets recorded and preserved somewhere.

The minutes of a meeting should include the following (if they apply to your particular group and your meetings):

- Date, time and place of meeting.
- List of people attending, and any members who were absent.
- Time the meeting was called to order.
- Approval of the previous meeting's minutes, and any amendments.
- Summary of reports, announcements, and other information shared.
- Proposals, resolutions, motions, amendments, a summary of the discussion, and final disposition (if you are using formal parliamentary procedure, record who made the motion and who seconded it).
- Time of adjournment.
- Next meeting date, time and location.
- Name of person taking the minutes.

Motions and resolutions should be recorded verbatim and should be read back during the meeting to make sure they have been accurately transcribed.

Summarise the discussion, capturing key points and decisions reached. When someone takes on an assignment, a deadline is set, or other important agreements are reached, make sure to record them. This will serve as a reminder when the minutes are read later on.

Separate fact from opinion. Facts are objective and indisputable; opinions are personal views. Take this sentence: "The low turnout for the event could be due to poor advertising." Whose idea is this? Attribute opinions to their source (e.g. "Jane suggested that..." or "The group concluded that...")

Sometimes, it can be helpful to distribute the minutes before the next meeting. This gives people a reminder of assignments and deadlines, as well as when and where the next meeting is.

Distribute copies and read the minutes near the beginning of the next meeting. Any corrections or additions should be recorded in the minutes of that meeting. The group should then approve the minutes, meaning that they agree that they are accurate and complete, either as read or as amended.

libcom.org 2005

This text is adapted from the original by Mary McGhee.

Building a solidarity network guide

A guide to building a successful solidarity network along the lines of the Seattle Solidarity Network, written by two SeaSol organisers, in text and PDF pamphlet format.

PDF versions:

US paper size: <http://libcom.org/files/seasol-pamphlet-expanded-US.pdf>

A4 paper size: <http://libcom.org/files/seasol-pamphlet-expanded-A4.pdf>

by Cold B and T Barnacle

Contents:

Introduction ~ Defining the scope ~ Prerequisites ~ Starting Fights ~ Demands ~ Strategy ~ A Taxonomy of Tactics ~ Meetings ~ Mobilizing ~ Structure and organizing capacity ~ Inside organizing

Introduction

In which we describe this article's intended purpose and audience.

The Seattle Solidarity Network (or “SeaSol” for short) is a small but growing workers’ and tenants’ mutual support organization that fights for specific demands using collective direct action. Founded in late 2007 by members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), SeaSol is directly democratic, is all-volunteer, has no central authority, and has no regular source of funding except small individual donations. We have successfully defeated a wide variety of employer and landlord abuses, including wage theft, slumlord neglect, deposit theft, outrageous fees, and predatory lawsuits.

We’ve gotten a lot of inquiries in the past several months from folks in other cities wanting to start something like SeaSol where they live. Our mission in this article is to describe, for the benefit of those trying to build something similar, our experience of what it took to get SeaSol started and to keep it growing.

Please note: we are writing as individuals, and not in the name of the organization.

Defining the scope

In which we discuss the challenges of defining the scope of a solidarity network project in its early days.

The first step in starting an organization is to decide what it’s for. When starting SeaSol, we made a point of defining the scope of it very broadly, and this has proved to be one of its greatest strengths. Last month we were fighting a housing agency over towing fees. Today we are fighting a restaurant owner over unpaid wages. Next month we might be up against a bank, an insurance company, or a school administration.

Because people are so used to single-issue organizing, when we first started it was difficult for some to wrap their minds around the idea of an organization that was not just about job issues or just about housing issues, but would deal equally with both, and beyond. There was also an urge to restrict the scope of the project to just certain sectors of the working class, such as the poorest of the poor, workers in specific industries, or specific neighborhoods within the city.

Rather than becoming specialists, we have insisted on keeping our scope broad and flexible. Any worker or tenant in the Seattle area can join and can bring their fight to SeaSol. This helps us to bring in as many people as possible, and to keep up a constant stream of action. It means that instead of developing identities as tenant, neighborhood, or industry activists, we are building a sense of broad working class solidarity. It also means that the activists who started the project did not have to see ourselves as something separate from the group we wanted to organize. We were part of that group.

Prerequisites

In which we explain the basic things we needed in order to be able to launch SeaSol.

People wanting to know how SeaSol got started often ask whether we had funding, whether we had an office, or whether we had extensive legal knowledge. We had none of these things, and we didn't need them. However, there were a few basic things that we absolutely did need to have in order to make it work, and they are probably just as essential for anyone else out there who wants to build a solidarity network.

1. One or two solid organizers. Of all the essential elements, this one tends to be the most difficult to come by. Without it, any new solidarity network is doomed. Other activists may come and go, but there must be at least some who are extremely dedicated to the project, competent, self-organized, able to put a lot of time into the work, and planning on sticking with it for at least a couple of years. In SeaSol, it helped that some also had prior organizing experience.

2. The ability to round up at least 15-20 people. This one is obvious, but people who are new to organizing almost always overestimate how many people they can mobilize. Getting 15 people to an action usually requires getting about 25 people to tell you, "Yes, I will be there."

For the first SeaSol actions, before we had an established phone tree, we just had to try to mobilize among our friends, our friends' friends, IWW members, and people connected to other pre-existing organizations. We also sent emails to a few old lists that were left over from defunct radical projects from the early 2000's. Our first action invitation was the only exciting thing that had gone out on some of those lists for a very long time, and this probably contributed to what we then considered an excellent turnout, 23 people.

3. The ability to reach out and find workers and tenants who have conflicts with their bosses and landlords. SeaSol did this by putting up posters around bus stops. See the 'Starting Fights' section for more on this.

4. Some logistical details. Starting a solidarity network requires very little money. You will need a place to meet, but there is no need to rent an office. We held meetings at an organizer's home for the first year of SeaSol. You will need a phone number that goes to voicemail – we don't try to be 'on call' whenever the phone rings (we're not paid social workers!). We use a free voicemail service that sends the messages to our internal email list. You will also need an email address, a website, and someone with decent graphic design ability for making posters and flyers.

5. A plan for getting started. You might be tempted to launch your solidarity network by publicly inviting all interested activists to an initial meeting. This is probably a mistake. When the direction of the project hasn't yet been firmly established through action, it's very easy to get blown off course. At this early stage, if you hold a large meeting by bringing in people with a wide variety of different ideas and agendas, you're likely to get a lot of confusion and strife, and not a lot of action. In SeaSol, our tiny initial group of like-minded activists spent several months putting up posters and winning a few fights before we ever publicly announced our meetings, or held any public events other than actions.

Starting Fights

In which we describe how we find people with employer or landlord conflicts and bring them into SeaSol campaigns.

Posterizing. From the start, our main way of finding new people with job or housing conflicts has been by putting up posters on telephone poles. We mostly post them in working class neighborhoods or in industrial areas where a lot of people work. The most effective places to stick them seem to be around high-traffic bus stops. Someone who's standing around waiting for a bus is more likely to take the time to read a poster than someone who's walking past.

We keep the content of our posters extremely simple and direct. Because we want to elicit fights that we can win with our current size and strength, our posters list specific problems that we think we can potentially deal with: "unpaid wages?" "stolen deposit?". If someone is currently facing one of these problems, these words are likely to catch their eye.

Posterizing is a 'passive' form of outreach, since we're leaving it up to the screwed-over worker or tenant to contact us and ask for our support, instead of us approaching them. We do this for a reason: people who have taken the initiative to contact us are more likely to be people who are prepared to play an active role in a campaign. Also the fact that they have approached us, and not the other way around, makes it easier for us to insist on some conditions in exchange for our support. For example, they'll have to be actively involved in their own fight, and they'll have to join the solidarity network and commit to coming out for others as well. That's our deal – take it or leave it.

Getting contacts via posters isn't easy. At the beginning of SeaSol, there were doubts about whether anyone would ever call us. We started by spending several weeks working on and arguing about text and design for two different versions, one for boss problems and one for landlord problems. Then we probably put up around 300 posters before we got our first call. They get torn down so we had to keep going back and putting them up again.

There are definitely people getting screwed over in your town. Don't give up if they don't call you right away. If you keep posterizing over and over in a lot of different places and still aren't getting calls, consider redesigning your poster. In our experience, the most effective posters do not look like anarchist propaganda. Try putting them on brightly colored paper, and make sure the key phrases ("unpaid wages?", "stolen deposit?") stand out large and clear to a casual passer-by.

Getting a call and setting up the first meeting. When someone calls us about a conflict with their employer or landlord, the SeaSol secretary-of-the-week listens to the voicemail and calls them back. The secretary asks questions, listens briefly to their story, explains what our group is about, and if it makes sense, sets up a first meeting with them, usually in a public place like a coffee shop. At these initial meetings we aim to have at least two, and no more than four SeaSol members present, with at least one being a committed organizer who has some experience.

Agitate – Educate – Organize. In this first meeting, we go through the classic organizing steps of “agitate – educate – organize”.

“Agitate”, in this case, doesn’t mean making a speech. It means listening to their story (even if they already told it on the phone) and asking questions to bring out exactly how the injustices affect their life. In talking through this they’re “agitating” themselves - in other words, they’re bringing to the surface the emotional forces which made them want to contact us in the first place. The emotional response to getting stepped on is often extremely powerful, but most of the time people bury these feelings in the back of their minds so they can get through day-to-day life. Now it all has to come back out. Only then will they be ready to face the possibly unfamiliar and scary idea of fighting back using direct action.

The next step, “Educate”, means helping them understand how something could be done about their situation through collective direct action. We do this by briefly describing how our action campaigns work, using real examples. We give them a sense of what their first action (the group demand delivery) might be like. We don’t bullshit them or promise that we will win their fight, but we give them a sense of the strategy behind our campaigns, and why it usually succeeds. We also briefly explain the other key things they need to understand about SeaSol, especially the fact that we’re all volunteers and that we’re not a law firm or a social service.

Finally, “Organize” means getting into the specific, practical tasks that we need to ask from them. Can they help us boil their problems down to a specific demand that we could fight for (see the ‘Demands’ section for more on this)? If we did fight for it, would they be able and willing to come to our meetings every week to take part in the planning? Would they be willing to become members of the solidarity network, receive frequent phone calls for actions in support of other workers and tenants, and commit to coming out whenever they could?

Deciding whether to take on the fight

We end the first meeting by making a plan to follow up with them, usually by phone, once SeaSol as a group has had a chance to decide whether we’re going to take on the fight. We ordinarily vote on this (majority rules) at our weekly meeting. If it’s really urgent, we use a passive consensus process called the “24 hour rule” by emailing a proposal to our higher traffic email list. If no one objects within 24 hours, then the proposal passes. But the situation is rarely urgent enough to require this process, and it’s basically impossible to use it for tricky decisions (since we won’t have consensus), so usually a decision to take on a fight can wait until the weekly meeting. We make sure not to invite the person (or people) requesting support to be present at this meeting -- otherwise we would never be able to say no.

We use three main criteria in deciding whether to take on a fight: Is the fight compelling enough to motivate our members and supporters? Are the affected workers/tenants ready to participate in the campaign? And, can we win it?

We think about **winnability** as the relationship between two factors: how hard it is for the boss/landlord to give in to our demand, versus how much we can hurt them. For example: consider a restaurant that owes its former dishwasher \$500 in unpaid wages. The restaurant has one location only, and it’s in a touristy area, where potential diners are not all that loyal to any particular restaurant. It is having cash flow problems.

How hard is it for them to give in? They’re having money troubles, so it might be a little hard for them to scrape together the \$500. On the other hand, this is always a matter of priorities, and \$500 is not a ton of money for a business. If we pressure the boss enough, it seems likely that he might be able to come up with it.

How much can we hurt them? Our ability to hurt any boss or landlord ranges from “we can embarrass them”, which is weak but still sometimes useful, to “we can put them out of business”, which is usually the strongest thing we can threaten. In the case of the real-life restaurant used in this example, with a few months of aggressive weekend picketing we could probably have put them out of business. After weighing the difficulty of the demand versus how much we could hurt them, we decided this was a winnable fight. As it turned out, the restaurant owner, after going through the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance), decided he didn’t want to find out if we could put him out of business, and the dishwasher got paid.

When we don’t think we can win a fight (or don’t have the capacity, and have too many fights ongoing already), we don’t take it on. Moving from victory to victory keeps the group energized and growing. Getting bogged down in unwinnable fights would do the opposite. As we grow stronger, fights which are unwinnable now will become winnable in the future.

Demands

In which we discuss the formulating and delivering of demands.

Formulating the demand.

Before we can decide on whether a fight would be winnable, we need to know exactly what we’d be fighting for. This is something we have to figure out during the initial meeting. Usually when someone first meets with us, they have a problem with their boss or landlord, but they don’t yet have a demand. We have to help them come up with a clear, specific, reasonable demand that can be communicated to the boss or landlord, telling them exactly what we expect them to do to address the problem. The demand should be as simple and concise as possible. Sometimes it’s necessary to include multiple demands, but it can’t be a huge laundry list. If the demand isn’t simple, righteous and compelling enough, our own people won’t understand or feel strongly enough to come out and fight for it. If it isn’t specific enough, we’ll end up with confusion over whether or not we’ve won.

Here is an example of a poorly-formulated demand to give to a landlord:

“Address ongoing issues concerning moisture and mold which have continued to be ignored.”

The main problem here is that it isn’t specific. How will we know when “ongoing issues” have been “addressed”?

Here is a better version:

“Repair the leaks in the kitchen and living room ceilings, which are causing water damage and mold.”

It’s clear and specific. There won’t be much room for doubt over whether or not it’s been done.

Putting it in writing.

When we present our demands, we always do so by handing over a written demand letter. If we were to present our demands verbally, we might find ourselves getting bogged down in back-and-forth arguments with the boss or landlord, which would lead to confusion and delay. Presenting the demands in writing helps us avoid this, and it also lets the group democratically decide on exactly what message we want to get across to the boss or landlord, without much risk of mix-ups or miscommunication.

Obviously the affected worker/tenant (or group of them) needs to be involved in the process of putting together the demand letter, and they need to be in agreement with the final version we end up with. However, this doesn’t mean we let them write whatever they want. The demand letter is signed in the name of the solidarity network as a whole, so we have to make

sure it's something that we as an organization are prepared to stand behind, and to fight a potentially long and hard campaign over.

We keep our demand letters extremely short and to the point. This is sometimes a challenge, because often the first impulse of the person we're supporting is to use this letter as a vehicle for expressing all their anger to the boss or landlord, or for presenting lengthy justifications for the demands. We have to explain that while all this stuff can be great when it comes to mobilizing our supporters, telling it to the boss or landlord isn't likely to do any good at this point. In the demand letter, there are really only three things we need to get across: (1) what the problem is, (2) what the boss or landlord needs to do about it, and (3) how much time we're going to wait before taking further action.

Here's an example:

Quote:

October 23, 2010

Mr. Ciro D'onofrio,

It has come to our attention that a former employee, Becky Davis, has not been paid the final wages she earned working for Bella Napoli, of which you are the owner.

A total of \$478 was never paid to her after her month of employment. The various reasons given

for this – missing invoices and a missing bottle of wine – seem to be spurious and untenable. As the owner of this company, we see it as your responsibility to ensure that this situation be resolved, and that your employee is paid in full the wages she is owed. We will expect this to be

done soon, within no more than 14 days. Otherwise we will take further action.

Sincerely,

Becky Davis and The Seattle Solidarity Network

www.seasol.net info@seasol.net 206-350-8650

Delivering the demand.

Our fights always begin with the delivery of the demand en masse. We round up a group of people, anywhere from 10 to 30, to go with the worker or tenant affected and confront the boss or landlord in their office or at their home. It isn't a violent confrontation, but nor is it a friendly visit. The group is there to get the boss or landlord's attention, to show that there is some real support behind the demand, and to make them think twice about retaliating. We don't engage in conversation -- in fact, sometimes these actions are entirely silent. Once the whole group has assembled in front of the boss or landlord, the worker or tenant affected steps forward and hands over the demand letter, and then we leave.

Some have argued that it would be quicker and easier just to send the demand letter by mail. In some cases this might be true, in the sense that we could get our demands met more efficiently this way, but it would not serve our larger goal of building up people power. Delivering the demand in person as a group builds a sense of solidarity, in a way that mailing a letter could never do. The people who take part in it end up feeling personally connected to the fight. This means that if the target boss or landlord gets scared and gives in quickly, it's an empowering victory for everyone who participated in the demand delivery. If the target does not give in quickly, then all those who came out are now much more likely to be willing and eager to come out for the follow-up actions. If we got our demands met just by mailing a

letter, the only people who would have participated in the victory would be the one or two individuals who had written the letter and dropped it in the mail. It would do nothing to build up power for the future.

When planning a demand delivery action, we don't want the boss or landlord to know we're coming. Without the element of surprise, the action would have much less impact. They might even arrange to be absent at the time of the action, or to have police there waiting for us. This actually happened to SeaSol once, when we had foolishly forwarded around an online action-announcement in which we named the company we were targeting. Since then, when announcing demand delivery actions we've always made sure to avoid broadcasting the name of the boss or landlord involved. Sometimes we assign them a code name.

Demand delivery actions can be a tense experience for some of our people, especially new folks. As we're approaching the target's office or home, the people in front seem to want to walk fast, while the ones in back lag behind. We've seen this lead to a situation where the person in front arrives almost alone in the target's office, and in their nervousness, hands over the demand letter and turns to leave before most of their backup has had a chance to file in through the door. Obviously this squanders a lot of the power of the action. To avoid this, we now make a point of asking the people in front to walk slowly, and the person carrying the demand letter stays in the back of the crowd until after we've all gathered in front of the target. Then, once the full presence of the group has been felt, we part like the Red Sea while the letter-bearer passes through and hands over the demand.

Why not refuse to leave until the boss / landlord gives in? Some have asked why we don't just stay there in the target's office until they've resolved the problem. No doubt occasionally this would scare them into giving in on the spot. But what about the other times, when they decide to be stubborn and refuse to give in? To counter us, all they'd have to do would be to call the cops and wait. After a while the cops would arrive to forcibly remove us, and with our current strength we would not be able to hold out for long. Then we'd be stuck spending our time on legal defense instead of planning further action against the boss or landlord. Plus, having started off our campaign with such an intense action, we'd have little or no room to further escalate the pressure.

By choosing to leave once we've delivered our message, with a promise of more action to come, we keep the initiative. Instead of trying to defend a space that we wouldn't actually be able to defend, we stay on the attack. This makes it very hard for the boss or landlord to counter us. We're there in their face before they know what's going on, and then we're gone before they can bring in the cops. We leave them with an impression of strength, and we leave them wondering what we'll do next.

Finally, depending on the demand, it's not always even possible for the boss or landlord to grant it on the spot. What about repairs to a building, or better safety equipment at work? Here the most we could force out of them immediately would be a written promise, which they would then be likely to break as soon as we were gone.

Strategy

In which we summarize the basic principles of strategy used in SeaSol fights.

If the boss/landlord doesn't give in before our deadline, then the pressure campaign begins. Through a sustained series of actions, we aim to create an increasingly unpleasant situation for the boss or landlord, from which their only escape is to grant our demands.

There is no sense doing a demand delivery unless we're ready to back it up with an action plan that can force the enemy to give in. Therefore we consider, what are the pressure points we can use against the enemy? How many people can we get out to an action, and what are

people willing to do at those actions? All of this takes a serious and thoughtful analysis of our own strength.

Our campaign strategy is based on the basic insight that the boss or landlord doesn't cave in as a result of what we just did to them--they cave in as a result of their fear of what we're going to do next. So we have to be able to **escalate**, or increase the pressure over time, and we have to **pace ourselves** so that we can sustain the fight for as long as it takes. At least once during a fight, we brainstorm possible tactics and order them from least to most pressure. Then we make a plan for how often and in which order we should carry them out.

To illustrate this, here's a list of the actions we took in our fight against Nelson Properties, in order from start to finish:

1. We did the mass demand delivery.
2. We started the ongoing posting and re-posting of "Do Not Rent Here" posters around many different Nelson buildings.
3. We started door-to-door tenants'-rights discussions with current Nelson tenants.
4. We started a series of small pickets in front of Nelson's office.
5. We delivered letters to Nelson's neighbors, warning them about an as-yet-unnamed slumlord in their midst, and promising to return en masse to discuss the problem with each neighbor in full detail. We made sure Nelson himself got a copy.

And then we won.

A Taxonomy of Tactics

In which we describe our criteria for evaluating tactics and elaborate a taxonomy of tactics we have tried.

For any potential tactic we have to ask ourselves these questions:

Does it hurt them? For example, does it cost them money? Does it hurt their reputation? Does it hurt their career?

Does it hurt us? Does it put too much strain on our people? Does it get us arrested, prosecuted, or sued?

Can we mobilize for it? Will our people like it? Will they understand it? Will they be able to do it? It is at a time when people are available?

We want all our actions to build people's experience, confidence, knowledge, and radicalization. We want to take action in an empowering manner, avoiding the disempowerment that comes from relying on bureaucrats, social workers, politicians, lawyers, and other "experts."

We take different approaches for different targets. We try to be creative and flexible. Tactics brainstorm sessions are sometimes hilarious. Picketing was great for Pita Pit because it was a public restaurant in a high foot-traffic area. Picketing was not a great idea for the Capitola Apartments, because it was hard to know when potential renters might show up to view the place, but repeatedly putting up "Do Not Rent Here" posters worked great.

Here are some of the types of tactics SeaSol has used so far. Each one has its pros, cons, and logistical considerations.

Handing out flyers in front of a workplace. Flyering at a workplace can be targeted at customers, at workers, or at random passers-by. Just handing out flyers is a little bit less aggressive than picketing with signs. The content can either be purely informational, just arousing sympathy and raising awareness of the issue (ostensibly—really it's always about

freaking out the boss), or it can be openly about turning away customers, as in “Don’t shop here!”.

Picketing a store / restaurant / hotel. The timing of a picket is really important and often warrants scouting the location to determine the time of most possible impact. We have found that direct messages garner the most attention: “Don’t Rent/Shop/Eat Here” grabs people’s attention more than a nebulous “Justice for all workers!” or similar. When we picket we usually hand out an aggressive flyer at the same time. We have also tried out other tricks to help turn away business. For example, in the Jimmy John’s fight, we handed out coupons for Subway; in the Greenlake and Nelson fights we had collected negative online reviews to show to potential customers; in the Tuff Shed fight we had a list of other shed stores to direct people to.

In some cases picketing can antagonize the current employees, especially if they are restaurant workers who are dependent on tips. Recently we have discussed the idea of always doing a week or two of less aggressive, informational picketing or flyering before we start aggressively turning away business. This would give us an opportunity to make contact with the current employees in a positive way and explain the issue to them. We have also begun taking up collections for the tip jar when picketing a coffee shop or restaurant.

Picketing an office. Usually picketing a company’s office does not turn away customers, but it does generate embarrassment. Again timing is key. When are their busy times? Sometimes we haven’t been sure if they’ve noticed us, so we’ve stood right in front of the door until they’ve asked us to leave.

Postering around a store / restaurant / hotel. Again, the content can be informational or else urging a boycott. Posters are usually targeted at foot traffic so we put them up accordingly (eye-level, facing sidewalks). Posters often get ripped down quickly.

Postering around vacant rental units. The posters usually say “DON’T RENT AT [name of building]”, and they highlight problems that will turn off potential renters, such as pests, mold, deposit theft, etc. We emphasize that if someone rents from this landlord, they too will suffer from the landlord’s injustices. Here we’re appealing to potential tenants’ self interest, whereas in a “don’t shop here” flyer, we’re typically making more of a moral appeal. To make sure the landlord sees the connection between these posters and our conflict and demands, we add a little explanatory text at the bottom, like “Nelson Properties is currently persecuting former tenant Maria. You could be next.”

Visiting neighbors with flyers. Airing the boss or landlord’s dirty laundry in front of their neighbors can often make them extremely uncomfortable. This is most effective when they live in an upscale neighborhood. You can approach the neighbors on the pretext that, as neighbors, they might be in a position to influence the boss or landlord to “do the right thing.” If neighbors do actually exert pressure, it’s more likely to have to do with the fact that the boss’s or landlord’s activities are subjecting the neighborhood to an uncomfortable situation, rather than based on moral considerations.

Visiting the landlord’s workplace (if any). The issues involved with visiting a workplace are very similar to visiting a neighborhood: to put the boss/landlord in an uncomfortable position. It’s good to show up in a big enough group to get a lot of attention, speak to the person’s boss and/or coworkers about the issue. We hope this will then generate secondary pressure on the landlord, via their boss ordering them to see to it that this doesn’t happen again.

Introductory letter to neighbors or coworkers. In the past we used to do neighbor or workplace visits without any warning, as a one-off tactic. This succeeded in upsetting the

boss or landlord quite a lot, but it didn't seem to cause them to give in. The problem was, it didn't generate ongoing pressure. After we did it, the damage was done – they had been “outed” to the neighbors/coworkers. Before we did it, they didn't know it was coming. So it didn't add any pressure.

After running into this problem several times, we decided to try doing the action in two parts. The second part is the visit as described above. The first part, one to three weeks earlier, consists of mailing or discreetly dropping off (on doorsteps or car windshields) “introductory letters” to the boss or landlord's neighbors or coworkers, making a point to accidentally mail or leave one for the boss/landlord themselves as well.

Here is an example of one of these letters, from our fight with Nelson Properties.

Quote:

Hello,

We would like to reach out to you, as concerned neighborhood residents, about a tragic situation which you may be in a position to influence for the better.

Maria and her family, who recently moved after suffering health problems due to landlord negligence, are now suffering further abuse at the hands of an unscrupulous business called Nelson Properties, which is rooted in this neighborhood. Having collecting rent from them without doing basic maintenance, Nelson is now pursuing Maria and her family for even more money that they do not owe and do not have, and is also wrongfully pocketing their deposit - a small extra profit for Nelson, but a huge loss for a low-income worker like Maria.

A group of concerned activists will be roaming the neighborhood soon to distribute more information and to discuss this issue in more depth with each household on the street.

We look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Seattle Solidarity Network

www.seasol.net

These letters are vague and polite—we don't want to sound like thugs—but they let the boss/landlord and neighbors/coworkers know that we will soon do something that will make them uncomfortable. It contains just enough information so that the boss or landlord themselves knows it's about them, but it won't necessarily be entirely clear to the neighbors/coworkers who this is about. This leaves plenty of room for us to get more specific when we actually visit the neighborhood or workplace.

In this particular example, we had been fighting them for a month, and then they gave in within two days after we delivered this letter.

Postering around the boss or landlord's home. We have found this to be an effective way of airing the target's dirty laundry in front of their neighbors and family members. This is similar to showing up in person but easier—it takes fewer people and can be repeated over and over as posters get torn down. Make sure to include the boss/landlord's name and address on the poster and if possible a photo of the boss/landlord or of their house.

Addressing city council meetings. Most city councils have a public comment period where anyone can speak. These are often televised. They're usually poorly attended, so a sizable organized group with a compelling message tends to get attention. This is mainly useful if the boss or landlord has business relationships with the city, or if the council has decisions to make which will impact their business in some way. Otherwise this tactic is not likely to have

much impact, unless the target is exceptionally high-profile and concerned about his/her reputation.

Come prepared with a short speech, so you're not making it up as you go along. This tactic has more impact if combined with picketing at the outside entrance before the start of the meeting. We have found it works well to have all supporters stand while the speaker is speaking and cheer after they finish. This allows for the presence of the group to be felt by the council in connection with what the speaker is saying.

Crashing events (such as open houses). This tactic makes the most sense in a long-running fight, where you are trying to find every possible way of making trouble for your target. When you find, usually by searching online, that a company you're fighting is holding an event that's open to the public, you can have a few people go in "plainclothes"—without picket signs—and blend in with the crowd. Then after a prearranged signal (someone yells, "yee-haw!"), they start distributing flyers to the crowd to inform everyone of the company's misdeeds. Don't forget to save some of the free snacks for your comrades outside.

Picketing at public meetings and events. Any meeting, convention, or other event that your target is connected to can be a good option for picketing. Your target may have dealings with government agencies, sponsor industry meet-ups, belong to a country club, or be connected to a charity. These can provide picketing opportunities where you can tarnish their reputation in the eyes of people whose good opinion they care about.

Calling to arrange to view an apartment. If a landlord has vacancies they are trying to fill, you can mess with them by calling to arrange viewings. This works best when combined with picketing or flyering outside the rental office or outside the for-rent unit. Then the person who arranged the viewing can either: (1) not show up and call later to say they've changed their mind after receiving a flyer about the conflict, or (2) if they're a good actor, they can go through with the viewing and act very uncomfortable about the people picketing/flyering outside.

Online reviews. Some businesses rely heavily on the internet for getting customers. There are several popular websites where anyone can post reviews about businesses. A sudden barrage of negative reviews can have a major impact. Plus it's a fun tactic that lots of people can do on their own time, and even supporters in other cities can help out. For this tactic to be effective, the target has to be able to see that the barrage of negative reviews is connected to your conflict and demands

Satirical charity events. If your target is known to be wealthy and is vulnerable to public shaming, holding highly-visible "charity" events on their behalf can be a clever way to ridicule them. To get the most possible mileage out of this tactic, plan it well in advance and advertise heavily with posters and/or flyers. Here's an example:

Quote:

Impoverished landlords Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh need your help! For months they have not been able to maintain decent health and safety conditions - such as clean drinking water and ventilation - in the house at 24260 132nd Ave SE, Kent. In protest, the family who lives there has decided to withhold rent money from them. The landlords are in such need of this money that they are now in the process of evicting the family!

You and your family are warmly invited to a Charity Bake Sale for Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh, from 3pm to 6pm on Sunday, April 26, at 24260 132nd Ave SE, Kent - right next to the Gurudwara Sacha Marg.

Come eat, and contribute whatever you can - even \$1 or 50 cents - to help Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh.

When we finally won our year-long fight against Lorig Associates, one of their conditions for giving in was that we formally agree not to hold any more charity bake sales for Bruce Lorig.

Tenant investigation. When fighting a large landlord, you might find it worthwhile to go door-to-door informing all the other tenants of their rights and asking about landlord abuses. We call this a “tenant investigation”. We generally go in with a half-page flyer that lists a bunch of common landlord-tenant problems and invites people to get in touch if they’d like more info about their rights. We make a point of leaving some of these lying around the building, so that management is sure to know about our visit. This tactic tends to make landlords pretty nervous, and it’s a great way to establish good relations with the other tenants who are not directly involved in the fight.

Noncompliance pact. We’ve been in a couple of fights in which a group of tenants were all facing evictions or major rent hikes. In this situation, a powerful tactic has been for everyone affected (or as many as are willing) to form a mutual “noncompliance pact”, and to inform the landlord that none of them are going to comply or voluntarily vacate the building until all their demands have been met. This puts the landlord in a tough position, since forcibly evicting even one tenant can be a lengthy and expensive process, so for a whole group of tenants it may be more trouble than giving in to the demands. Here’s an example of a “noncompliance” letter, signed by ten residents in an apartment building:

Quote:

We, tenants of the Kasota apartments who are not Sound Mental Health clients, hereby notify you that we cannot accept the cruel and unjust way in which we are now being forced from our homes. You have presented us with a rent increase which is so extreme, you must be aware that we could not possibly afford to pay it. It appears that the intent is simply to drive us out.

If we are to be forced out of our homes, then we respectfully insist that you provide each of us with relocation assistance, so that we can find other places to live and not join the ranks of the homeless.

We hereby pledge:

Unless and until each and every one of us has received adequate relocation assistance, none of us will pay the increased rent or voluntarily vacate the building.

Meetings

In which we discuss what it takes for solidarity network meetings to be inclusive, democratic, and effective at getting things done.

Meetings may be a boring topic to write or read about, but in fact, we spend more time together in meetings than we do on picket lines. Meetings are where the actual planning of our campaigns happens. Meetings are also where we put direct democracy into practice. In this section, we’ll go over a few of the key practices we’ve developed in the course of three years of SeaSol meetings.

We meet every week, and we really get stuff done during these meetings. When SeaSol first formed, we only met twice per month. The long gaps between regular meetings meant that most of the logistics and planning of our fights had to get done separately in between these meetings, in small ad hoc planning sessions among the most active organizers. This made it hard for newer people to start participating in a meaningful way. It was also hard on our schedules. When we finally switched to meeting every week, splitting the meeting into smaller “breakout” sessions where needed, it seriously improved our ability to grow and to take on more fights. Now, these regular meetings are the place where almost all of our actual

planning gets done, and there's rarely a need for separate planning sessions in between. The regular meetings now provide a space where any SeaSol member who wants to step up can easily start participating, alongside more experienced folks, in the planning and execution of our campaigns. Having this "permeability" within the group, where new people can easily volunteer for jobs and can get involved in real organizing very quickly, gives a huge boost to our ability to bring in and develop new organizers. Also our meetings are now much better attended, since they're much more worth attending.

We assign clear responsibility for specific tasks. In a representative democracy, or in a staff-driven organization that has a Board of Directors, there is usually a fixed distinction between "legislative" and "executive" roles, in other words, between those who make the decisions and those who carry them out. In a direct, participatory democracy like SeaSol, this is not the case. Because we have no fixed "executive" who can be expected to carry out the decisions of the group, whenever we decide to do something, we then have to ask, "which of us will take responsibility for making sure this task gets done?" Otherwise, more often than not it won't get done at all, and our democratic decisions will be meaningless. When we give someone responsibility for a specific task, this does not mean we're giving them authority, in the sense of a coercive ability to order others around. They just have to ask nicely for help, and hope that others are willing to cooperate. If all else fails, they just have to do it themselves.

We create an agenda at the beginning of each meeting. Whoever is present at the beginning of a meeting has an opportunity to contribute agenda items. This process doesn't take long, because the main items tend to be the same every week: incoming calls, breakouts to plan ongoing fights, outreach to bring in new members, etc etc.

Time is of the essence. Some people like to use group meetings as opportunities for ranting at great length on various topics. If we allowed this, our meetings would run on forever and we wouldn't get much done. To prevent it, when making the agenda we set a time limit for each item, and we ask someone to play the role of "time keeper" for the meeting. This allows us to manage the overall length of the meeting, and to make sure everything essential gets done.

We use strong meeting facilitation. In our experience, probably the most important factor in making a SeaSol meeting work well is having a strong, competent facilitator. It's the facilitator's job to make sure that we're moving through the agenda, that decisions are being made democratically, and that everyone who wants to participate has the opportunity to do so. This is a tricky skill, and it takes time, effort and practice to develop it. We're always trying to help each other get better at it.

Here are some tips we've put together to give to new people in SeaSol who want to try facilitating a meeting:

Tips & Tricks for SeaSol meeting facilitation

Quote:

- Listen for proposals in what people are saying. Try to steer the group towards making decisions and acting upon them, instead of talking in circles.
- Restate proposals to make sure everyone knows what's being decided on. A few phrases you can use are: "What I'm hearing is..." and "We have a proposal to..."
- When in doubt, take a vote.
- Keep "stack", i.e. a list of people who want to speak on a topic. Call on people in order. If it's too much to keep track of, you can recruit a helper to keep stack for you.

- Don't be afraid to cut people off if they are talking out of turn, over time, or interrupting other people.
- Don't abuse your position as chair to give your opinion more weight / time / authority.
- Be neutral when you ask for votes, and use the same tone of voice for all options. As in: "All in favor." "All opposed." Rather than: "Does anyone want to vote against this?"
- Always have a time keeper and note taker.
- Add up the length of the agenda at the beginning of meeting so the group knows what they're getting into. This may cause people to decide to spend less time on certain items.
- You can ask the time keeper to give you warnings (5 min, 3 min, 1 min)
- Ask meeting attendees' permission to extend the time on an agenda item (possibly through a quick vote).
- Periodically check back in about the meeting's remaining time, and when the meeting is projected to end.
- Need a break? Ask someone else to take over as chair.
- If your mouth gets dry, it's a sign that you're talking too much.

Mobilizing

In which we describe how we consistently turn out enough people for our actions

Since the point of a solidarity network is to engage in direct action, mobilizing people for actions is one of the most important things we do as a group. We take our ability to mobilize very seriously. We try not to waste people's time or mess people around by frequently canceling or rescheduling actions, and we try to make sure our actions are worth showing up to.

SeaSol's main tool for mobilizing is a phone tree, currently with about 170 people. Each member of the organizing team (What's that? See the section on "Organizing capacity and group structure") is a "branch" on the tree and has about 10 people to mobilize each time we have a major action. Whenever possible we want to use the strength of existing social bonds, so for example if someone on the phone tree is a close friend of one of the organizers, then they should probably be on that organizer's calling list. We also have a mass email list for action announcements. Mass emails rarely cause many people to show up, but they're useful for a reminder or for reference. An individual email sent to a friend who checks email a lot ("Hey Kate, can you come out for this?") is a different story -- personal invites can work well in any medium, depending on the habits and preferences of the person you're inviting.

Regardless of how we're contacting someone for an action, our goal is always to get an answer from them -- yes, no, or maybe -- as to whether or not they'll be coming. A person who has said "Yes, I'll be there" to another human being is much more likely to show up to an action than someone who's just received a message. For that reason, when making phone calls we make a concerted effort to actually talk to people rather than talking to their voice mail. Before leaving a message, we try calling on two different days, sometimes at different times.

It's important to have realistic expectations about **turnout**. If you want to get a lot of people to an action, it usually takes a lot of work and organization. Out of thirty people who say "yes", we've generally found that somewhere between fifteen and twenty will show up. Out of ten people who say "maybe", we might expect between zero and two (maybe means no!).

To consistently do a good job at mobilizing requires some structure and some collective responsibility. Our organizing team always has a deadline for when we should get our calls done. We report our results to each other by email. Then the person who's "bottom line" for the action follows up with anyone who hasn't reported yet, to see if they need help and to make sure it gets done.

Structure and organizing capacity

In which we discuss the challenges of organizational structure and of developing solid organizers

At the beginning, SeaSol had almost no formal structure. There wasn't much need for it, since we were a tiny group of people with a low level of activity. We realized that we might later have more need for formal structures, as the group got bigger and more active, but we did not try to set them up in advance. In hindsight, this seems to have been a wise decision. If we had spent our time arguing about, planning, and then maintaining formal structures that we hypothetically might need at some point in the future, it would have been a serious drag on our ability to start taking action and building real strength. Instead, over time we have added on pieces of structural organization (e.g. an organizing team, a secretary role, a definition of membership) on an as-needed basis, as the group's increased size and complexity has created both the need for them and the capacity to maintain them.

For example, for our whole first year we informally left almost all administrative work to one dedicated, reliable person who had a ton of free time. That was who answered the calls, replied to emails, and set up the initial meetings for new fights. The role was not elected or even formally defined. The work just needed to get done, and if we only had one person who was able and willing to do it consistently, that was who had to do it. Then later on, once we had multiple reliable and committed people who were able to shoulder that burden, we created a formally defined role called "secretary duty", which changes hands almost every week.

As we've developed SeaSol's structure, we've always wrestled with the fact that there have been dramatically unequal levels of involvement between different people in the group. In principle we would prefer to have everyone participating equally. However, this doesn't seem to be possible in a volunteer-based organization. We will always (if we're lucky) have some people who want to spend half their waking hours on solidarity-network organizing, while others only want to receive an occasional email, and the rest are somewhere in between.

SeaSol has decided to accept this unevenness as a fact of life, and to develop a structure that makes room for different levels of involvement. We try to make it as easy as possible for people to move from one level to the next.

When someone signs up online for our action-announcements phone list or email list, and they haven't yet been to an action or a meeting, at first we consider them a "supporter". At this level, at most they'll get a phone call about once per month inviting them to an action. Once someone comes out to an action, at the end of the action they'll be invited to become a "member". Being a member doesn't require them to pay dues, but it means considering themselves part of SeaSol, committing to come out to actions whenever possible, and receiving much more frequent phone calls and emails. When someone enlists SeaSol for their own job or housing conflict, they're required to become a member if they weren't already.

The highest level of commitment is to be an "organizer", i.e. a member of the organizing committee (or "team"). Although it's technically an elected committee, we encourage as many people to join it as are willing. Organizers commit to coming to all weekly meetings and to being the "branches" on the phone tree whenever we do a mobilization. Organizing committee members are also the ones who return calls and who take the lead on meeting with

people for potential new fights. The organizing committee does not have any special powers, nor does it ever meet separately from the rest of SeaSol. It's a position of responsibility, not of authority.

Having this committed core group is absolutely essential to SeaSol's ability to keep things going and to get things done consistently. When projects don't have a group of people who have committed to doing a certain amount of work, they tend to end up with one or two poor overworked souls actually doing everything to keep things together, while the people around them say, 'Wow, this just works! It's easy! It's so organic!'

Whatever energy we can spare from the basic organizing, we try to spend on developing new people's organizing capacity. We have semi-regular trainings covering the basic skills it takes to run a direct action campaign. Afterwards, we often do one-on-one followup sessions where we share our strengths, challenges, and goals as organizers.

There is often a difficult balance to strike between developing newer people and making sure stuff gets done. People don't like to feel micromanaged, but on the other hand, leaving them to fail at a task or drop the ball can be even more demoralizing and disempowering. We have a few strategies to try to walk this fine line. First, we maintain a group culture that more or less frowns on flakiness and values solidness. When you take on a task, everyone expects that you will actually do the task by the time you agreed to, and then report back on your progress. When you do so, you gain some respect within the group. When you don't, you lose some. This generates real social pressure to follow through on what you say you're going to do. Second, we make an effort to push people to move past their fears and try out new aspects of organizing. This can be as simple as doing a task with someone the first time, and then the second time asking, "Why don't you try taking the lead this time?" The standard axiom for this is, "see one, do one, teach one," although it should probably be "see a few, do a lot, teach one". Third, we follow up with each other to offer support and to help work through any obstacles people are facing in getting stuff done. When a new person volunteers to bottom-line something, we often have someone who's more experienced volunteer to be their "backup" person, to help them through any difficulties and to pick up the ball if it gets dropped.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that the most common obstacle to people developing their organizing capacity within SeaSol has been personal disorganization, i.e. not keeping a calendar. Just by the simple step of starting to keep a calendar, we've seen hopelessly flaky people go through dramatic transformations and become awesome organizers.

Inside organizing

In which we describe our current efforts towards expanding SeaSol's scope to include the building of worker and tenant committees within workplaces and apartment buildings.

So far, most of SeaSol's workplace-related fights have been in support of someone who has already quit or been fired, and either they're owed wages, or they were fired unjustly, or the employer is still retaliating against them in some way (threatening to sue them, stopping them from getting unemployment or injury benefits, etc). Likewise most of our landlord fights have been in support of someone who has moved out of the building and has had their deposit stolen or been charged unreasonable fees. In these situations, the ex-employee or ex-tenant no longer has much to lose in fighting back, since the target employer or landlord is no longer in a position to fire or evict them. This makes it possible for us to launch almost immediately into a public action campaign to deal with the individual injustice.

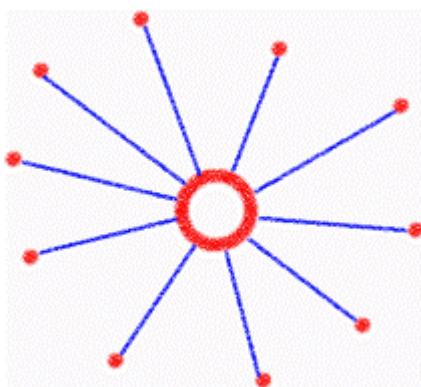
On the other hand, when we're working with someone who wants our help in fighting their current boss or landlord, the strategy has to be different. If an individual worker or tenant

were to target their current boss or landlord with a SeaSol campaign, while still isolated within their own workplace or apartment building, they'd be almost certain to get hit with extreme retaliation, if not outright firing or eviction. Therefore in this situation, instead of immediately launching an open campaign to support the individual, our first task is to help them build up a strong committee of workers within the workplace, or of tenants within the apartment building. This has to happen "under the radar" as much as possible, through careful one-on-one organizing. Only then, when there is a united group within the workplace or apartment building, does it make sense for them (or for SeaSol) to launch into an open, public struggle against the boss or landlord.

SeaSol is only now starting to put serious work into developing the capacity to do this kind of "inside" organizing effectively, while continuing to carry on our usual "outside" fights at the same time. We're going into this effort jointly with the IWW, making heavy use of the IWW's on-the-job organizing training curriculum. It's the next frontier. [cue inspiring theme music]

*Got questions? Want to talk to us? Coming through Seattle?
Contact the authors: coldbandtbarnacle@seasol.net.*

Federations and networks guide



Information about different ways of setting up effective organisations that have more than one group or section within them.

What is a federation?

Federations are essentially unions of autonomous organisations and/or affinity groups. An anarchist federation can be viewed as the regional, or national, or international decision making body of the union (depending on the federation's self-imposed geographical limitations) and the collectives or affinity groups that belong to the federation can be viewed as autonomous union locals. Federations are formal organisations with constitutions, bylaws, and specific membership guidelines. There are three general types of federations that have been formed in recent memory, they can be referred to as "Specialist", "General Revolutionary", and "Synthesist" Federations. This terminology is in no way standard, but it is useful for purposes of description.

Specialist federations

Federations, like affinity groups and collectives, can exist to serve a specific role or achieve a specific goal. An example of a "specialist" federation is the Anarchist Black Cross Federation (ABCF <http://www.anarchistblackcross.org>), which exists to do support work for political prisoners.

General revolutionary federations

Federations can also be very broad in scope and focus on organising around a particular

political viewpoint, as well as doing organising work and activism that embodies and advances that political view. An example of a "general revolutionary" federation is the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists (NEFAC <http://www.nefac.net>), which is a federation with a broad scope that does a variety of organising and activism consistent with the principles of Anarchist-Communism.

Synthesist federations

An Anarchist federation that is "synthesist" is one that attempts to be inclusive of all Anarchist tendencies and bring Anarchists of all the varying tendencies into a single organisation - a "synthesist federation" can be considered a subcategory of "general revolutionary" federations. The closest example of a contemporary "synthesist" federation is the defunct Love and Rage Federation (in North America).

Federation structure

How a federation is organised and how it makes decisions is entirely up to the members of the federation. But, in terms of decision making, it can be safely said that all currently viable Anarchist federations use recallable delegates that are sent by their collectives and/or affinity groups to federation assemblies to make decisions that pertain to the federation as a whole. In terms of the what the specific internal structure of a federation is or whether consensus or direct democracy is used by the federation to make decisions, there are no hard and fast rules other than the structure and decision making method used by the federation must be consistent with the fundamental principles of Anarchism.

What is a Network?

A useful way to define an anarchist network is to compare it to an anarchist federation. Networks are far less formal than a federation (although, some networks are formal enough in structure to blur the line between network and federation), and they usually only require an agreement to a set of principles or the sharing of a general political viewpoint as a qualification for membership. Also, unlike federations which emphasise collective action and organisation, networks emphasise autonomy over formal organisation. This does not mean to imply that anarchist networks are not organised or that they are against organisation. It simply means that their organisational focus is on allowing individual member groups to engage in actions that fit within the context of the network and utilise the network itself primarily for solidarity and support of the individual member groups as needed.

Generally speaking, there are two main types of networks: formal networks and informal networks.

Formal networks

What typically makes a network formal is that it has a "global" decision making structure - meaning that, like a federation, there is an overarching body of delegates that make decisions pertaining to the network as a whole - in most other aspects formal networks are mostly the same as informal networks. A good example of a formal network was, the now largely defunct, Direct Action Network (DAN).

libcom.org 2005

Adapted from Anarchism in Action by Shawn Ewald.

Media and publicity guide



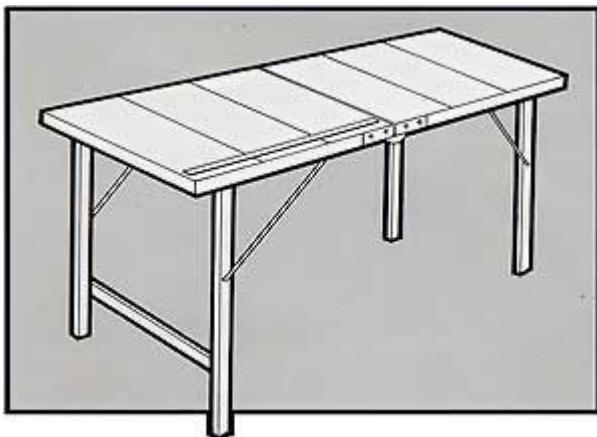
How to get the word out about your group or campaign? There are two main approaches, which should both be used: using the mainstream and corporate media, and building your own independent media. This page contains advice on both.

Independent media guide



A guide with advice and information on developing your own media, from online and printed publications to speeches, flyposting and more.

A guide to setting up and running stalls



A guide with tips and advice for running a stall for a political or campaign group to distribute literature and maybe raise funds.

Why set up a stall?

Setting up a literature table at events is a lot of work; why should you put so much energy into this? Answers:

- A. Tabling makes money
- B. Tabling provides outreach for your group
- C. Tabling provides activity for members looking for something to do.

All of these benefits are essential for building your group, and making it strong. It is important, especially when you are not involved in a local organizing drive, to generate activity and be seen. And, if your group is not active, and you do not plan any events, your members will drift away.

Where to set up a table

All of the following events and locations are useful and beneficial to some degree. They are listed in decreasing order of likely success (based on observations made by experienced East Bay IWW members):

- A. Big political events, demonstrations, and marches;
- B. Events of your own;
- C. Small events;
- D. Specific locations in your community;

It is best to start with no more than one event or tabling effort per month and build up your momentum. The least likely to succeed (in terms of raising money or general outreach) is establishing a table in front of a supermarket or a transportation center. Tabling at big political events, on the other hand, while not especially conducive to organizing, is nevertheless much more conducive to raising money for the group and letting active folks know of your group's existence.

Supplies you will need

In order to successfully table and accommodate your volunteers, you should obtain the following (lightweight, yet durable materials are the best)

- A. Portable Tables (if none are available, a tarp laid out on flat ground will work)
- B. Folding Chairs
- C. Milk Crates (for transport; can double as chairs)

- D. Rubber Bands (wind is always a nuisance)
- E. A Cash Box and \$20 in Small Bills for change (round your prices off to the dollar; it's much easier)
- F. Clip Boards (for petitions and sign-up sheets)
- G. Literature Racks (not essential, but highly useful, especially if space is limited)
- H. Tarps and Rope (in wet climates)
- I. Marker pens (always come in handy)

And, a durable hand truck with straps for transport is essential. These can usually be found for very little money (less than \$50) second hand. But get one that is durable and will last. Airport luggage carts are flimsy and will fall apart due to wear and tear.

Free literature

If your table is full of neat stuff for sale, you will be able to distribute a great deal of organizing literature for free, because folks who come to the table, whether to browse, buy, or ask questions, will inevitably accept any free information you provide. So, it is not a bad idea to produce some basic literature explaining what your group is working on and/or has accomplished. Petitions and Pledges of Solidarity are also useful to have. This is yet another benefit of setting up an table.

Guidelines for setting up a stall (free literature and merchandise)

1. Be sure that the name of your group appears on a sign or banner prominently displayed and visible from a distance. People want to know who you are.
2. If you are selling merchandise: Have an appropriate amount of change in a cash box or other suitable container. The cash box should also contain pens, pencils, tape, scratch paper, etc. As the day goes on, if you are accumulating a considerable amount of money in the cash box, take out all cash except what you need to make change and put it in a safe place . Do not neglect to do this, so that the risk of theft can be kept to a minimum. Keep careful records of financial transactions while tabling – it might be a good idea to keep a record of donations, memberships, sales, and sales tax, separately.
3. Make the table display as attractive as possible. A tablecloth perhaps, a variety of colorful books, shirts, eye-catching signs, posters, etc., will draw people over. Hang up shirts if you can instead of just putting them flat on a table.
4. Put free literature front and center to make it as easy as possible for people to pick up something and take it with them.
5. As people approach the table, stand up and engage them in friendly conversation.
6. Always provide a sign-up sheet that offers further contact. Usually that contact would be a promise to receive the next issue of your newsletter or to notify people of an upcoming event you're planning. Forward a copy of these sign-up sheets to the person in your group who keeps track of your group's mailing list. This is more important for small groups for whom adding a few new members would be a big boost than for large groups, which will probably find it too much work and cost for minimal response.
7. The person in charge of the booth should know prices of all merchandise for sale. Take an up-to-date price list of all merchandise. All items should be marked with the price, whenever possible.
8. As the day goes on, straighten literature periodically to maintain a neat appearance of the table. For outdoor events, have with you a plastic sheet of some kind for a quick cover if it rains, and a bunch of clean rocks (or rubber bands) you can use to keep pamphlets from

blowing away if it's windy. Protect the free literature as carefully from moisture and excessive dust as you would the merchandise for sale.

9. If someone asks you a question about the material you are tabling that you don't know the answer to, try to get their name and phone number. Offer to find out the answer and call them back -- then do it. This is much preferable to giving incorrect information, or none.

10. For groups that have merchandise brochures and can fulfill mail orders: If someone shows an interest in an item you can't supply right then, give them a merchandise brochure and invite them to place an order for it.

Other ways to distribute free literature

Coffeehouses: There are often vegetarian or eclectic cafés, coffeehouses or stores which are not corporate and cater to casual patrons who aren't rich people or trendy. Basically, they are places YOU would feel comfortable hanging out at with your friends. Some may be meeting places for activists. These are a good bet for leaving literature but, you should clear it with the people who run the place before leaving any literature. If they won't go for it, don't try to convince them. Just find another place where they will let you leave literature.

CARE Packages: Send CARE packages of literature to people who write for more info about your group or its politics or who express an interest in anarchism in letters and e-mails pertaining to work your group is doing for anarchist-related projects. It is a good idea to be networked with other anarchists in your area so if people get information request letters, they can refer them to you so you can send the person a CARE package.

Other collectives: Give your literature to other collectives and to friends whom you know will put your literature out. Some of them will also have THEIR OWN tabling projects. In this way, you can get more literature out than if your group were doing all the work themselves.

Excerpted from How To Do A Red and Black Book Project by Scott, Insurgency Culture Collective with modifications by Shawn Ewald, Guidelines for Tabling with modifications by Shawn Ewald and from Steve Ongerth, East Bay IWW with modifications by Shawn Ewald.

Book review writing guide



Tips and advice on how to write a review of a book or pamphlet.

Book reviews. If you write or publish anything reviews can be a gain or a pain. Even the pain of negative feedback can sometimes help. To readers they can be a warning, a source of information, or the leaping-off point for research and discussion. Just like there never seems to be enough books in the world, there's never enough reviewers, and it's a good way to develop critical writing skills.

Why

There are several reasons why you might want to review something. Maybe you know the author.

Maybe you want a free book. Neither is automatically a bad thing, as long as you can do a reasonable review. At least one of the following should apply:

- You can say if the book does what it tries to do.
- You can fill in some interesting background to the book.
- You think the book is good and should be more widely known.
- You think it's awful and should be challenged.
- You want to discuss the ideas in the book.
- You can write an interesting piece on what the book made you think

How

Just as you should think about why you're doing a review, you should ask why this book was written. This is probably more important than all the ins and outs of what goes on. Books get written on all sorts of subjects, but they all have their own axe to grind or point to prove. It might be 'rebellion is natural' or 'human ingenuity knows no bounds' but try and see if you can find it and sum it up in a couple of sentences.

Your reader will want to know what you think of the book. Is it good or bad? Did you find it useful or annoying? Explain why. Is it infuriating because they don't say where quotes come from? Or because they think quoting big names proves something: 'Socrates! Well that's OK then!' as John Barker says (in *Frankenstein and the Chickenhawks*.)

Try to give people some grasp on what's going on if they do go and read it. Reviews of books that no one else will ever find can be interesting too, because they communicate some of those ideas again. In this case you can be less wary of saying what happens in the book - though of course, it will help if you appraise it too.

It's sometimes a good idea to lift examples from the book to show how they write or what point (they say) they're trying to make.

Comparing and contrasting two books that are connected (e.g. a personal account and a historical overview of the same events) can be much easier than starting from scratch. You can also use your imagination to connect two different books.

Sometimes the book you're reviewing is only a jumping-off point. John Barker's review of Tom Vague's *Anarchy in the UK* (on the Angry Brigade) is partly concerned with why it's not a very good book; mostly it's concerned with what it was like to be an activist in the early seventies.

If you don't have in-depth knowledge of a subject, that needn't stop you reviewing a book about it. You could still use your common sense to discuss the subject, as well as what writers think.

Try to be interesting but don't pad it out and don't worry if that means you end up with a short piece. Watch out for running off at a tangent. Sometimes that can be a good response to a bad book, but maybe stick to one tangent at a time!

It's always a good idea to someone else to read your review; preferably someone who hasn't read the book.

By the [*Kate Sharpley Library*](#)

Flyposting guide



Guide with tips and advice on flyposting, or "wheatpasting", for advertising and getting your message out to a wide audience on a low budget.

Why flypost?

Why not? Why be shy about what you want to say to the world? Almost all the information that reaches people in our society about the world around us goes through channels ('the media') which are controlled and mostly owned by people with a huge vested interest in keeping society how it is.

While some stuff which challenges this gets through, the vast majority of news and views that reaches people is confined within very narrow boundaries - anything outside those boundaries is labelled as 'extremist', and easily dismissed.

All sorts of dodgy people pay huge amounts of money to designers and councils to paste their consumerism bullshit all over our streets - why shouldn't you have your say?

What to post

Anything you like. Information you want people to know, events that are happening and news that never gets in the 'mainstream' media.

You can also paste up all sorts of other things: artwork, slogans, surreal messages, stories. Anything that puts an alternative point of view onto our streets is playing a valuable role in undermining the 'status quo', by challenging people's automatic acceptance of mainstream values.

You can make copies of things you like or design your own. If you are doing something that obviously comes from a particular group or organisation, remember to put 'not for flyposting' at the bottom of it.

You may have access to a flashy computer and high quality copying or you may be writing something by hand and copying it in a shop. Don't be ashamed to put up really rough-looking stuff. The important thing is getting the message across - and no-one knows it's you anyway!

Where?

Where you put your posters depends on what they are. Stuff with loads of information on needs to be where people are likely to read it all - bus shelters are good, but your poster won't stay up very long. Look out for old posters that are still up - a sure sign of a site with a long life. Show some respect to fellow flyposters and don't stick your stuff on top of theirs unless the event has already happened (unless they're a dodgy Nazi outfit, of course!). You may like to post your stuff over billboard adverts that you don't like - your poster may even be specially designed to go over particular adverts. Obviously though, don't post it anywhere anti-social (i.e. some person's house, car etc).

Be warned though, that if you start regularly posting up over the big music posters, you may end up getting a visit from some very unsavoury types - that operation is run by some very dodgy gangs who are not adverse to a bit of aggro if they think you're invading their 'patch'.

Our favourite spots include disused buildings, lampposts, tube stations, backs of buses (if you're cheeky enough!), street furniture, pub toilets. Be audacious! If you're targeting an individual corporation, stencilling the steps up to their office with your message is often a good way of reminding them of your cause!

The most important thing is to get the message out!

How to flypost

You need: wallpaper paste, a big paint brush (some people prefer rollers) and a bucket. Plastic bags are less obvious than a bucket, but make sure to use two or three bags - spilt paste can be very messy! Another very useful bit of kit is a bicycle - it's amazing how much more you get done!

It's best to post in pairs (or threes), so one can keep a lookout, Watch out also for closed circuit TV.

Remember that if you look shifty and nervous you will draw attention to yourselves - also being relaxed helps you appreciate just how much fun you are having,

Paste on the wall where the poster is going to go. Put the poster up, press it flat and then paste over it again. This helps to smooth out bubbles, and also makes it harder to rip the poster off.

Some people prefer to flypost in the dead of night, some do it in broad daylight. This depends a lot on the area you are in, it's up to you.

The law

In most areas there are local by-laws against flyposting. Breaking these by-laws is a criminal offence, which means that if the police catch you, [you can be arrested](#) and charged and possibly end up in front of magistrate getting a small fine.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 increases maximum fines from £1000 to £2500, with authorised council officials now able to issue £50 'on the spot' fines. Note that it's only the person caught flyposting that can get prosecuted, not the company or club advertised on the poster.

Make sure you've got some idea of your rights if you are arrested, just in case - this will make you feel a lot more confident dealing with the police.

Other ideas

Stickers: you can make these on a computer, or use sheets of stickers by drawing onto all the stickers on one sheet, then photocopying from that.

Stencils: Good for putting a message up quickly, Especially good for symbols/ logos/ pictures?. Best made out of lino to last a long time and stay flat easily.

Banners: Another handy method of drawing attention to your message is to paint up and old bedsheet and hang it from a busy footbridge (the pedestrian footbridge in Vauxhall, South London is especially good for this). Make sure that it's securely tied and that you won't be needing it for the night's kip!

Taken from urban75.com, edited by libcom

Graffiti guide



A beginners' guide to doing graffiti, covering paints, spraypaints, stencils, surfaces and general advice.

What you will need

Paint. Oh really. However, there are a fuck of a lot of different types of paint so here's a few pointers:

Brush paints

Come in several flavours. All of which are preferable to spray cans as they are not so environmentally damaging. We generally block the piece in using emulsion and then outline & highlight it using cans (if its in a dodgy place, or if its small) or more brush paint if we have time. Emulsion (or any other water based paint) is crap in the rain. Otherwise, it lasts a fair while and you can spray on top of it while its still wet. This is very handy. Masonry paint has all these advantages, being a water based, but also lasts literally a lifetime. You can get the colour you want made up in shops. Emulsion tends to be in boring colours, but you can get fucking wicked coloured concentrated dyes from paint shops that will dye a swimming pool full of white emulsion pink/purple/whatever. Powder/poster paint also mixes with anything water based. These are quite cheap to get hold of. Emulsion and masonry paint are quite easy to tat, from scrap stores or people who have been redecorating. Masonry paint is more expensive to buy than emulsion, twenty quid for five litres-ish.

Gloss

Lasts fucking ages and you can use it in the rain - but you can't spray over it till it dries (3 hours ish - come back tomorrow night) and you have to use white spirit to get rid of it / wash brushes. Beware, it can be very runny. Gloss is expensive if you buy it (six quid a litre ish? not sure) but easily tattable.

Spray cans

Make these plan B, coz they are seriously toxic and totally unrecycleable. But if you are painting in a busy place they are extremely quick (speshly if you are using stencils) and come in super sexy colours. They are also very clean, speshly if you wear gloves. Most car spray paints are crap. But there are bitumen based blacks and a few other colours designed to cover bodywork chips that cover well and the blacks do not come off. There is one particular make

called stonechip that you can get in black and white that is very shexy. With a New York fat cap (see next section) it comes out nice and slow, never drips, covers everything and is perfect for outlines. Art sprays are hard-ish to get hold of and cost about £3.50 for a 400 ml can. You can get them in most large (UK) cities in record shops. Maybe its obvious, but spraying inside stinks.

Nozzles (caps)

Before you go out, make sure you've got the caps you need. Not having the right cap renders your spraycan useless. Fiddly little buggers. There are basically two types. Fat and skinny. Keep a few of each on you when you're out. Unfortunately all the makes of spray fit different caps. Working out which fits what is just trial and error. When you buy cans, get say five of each type that they sell (they're usually about 20p each) and experiment. When you buy art sprays, the nozzle they come with is usually fine, with car/plasticote sprays (not recommended anyway coz they're shit and really seriously poisonous to our planet) the nozzles are often crap. After using the can, either turn it upside down (so paint doesn't come out) and spray propellant through the cap to clear it, or take the cap off and blow through it. I prefer blowing coz it gives you multicoloured hard wearing lipstick. Some caps, for instance the New York skinny cap, don't fit on many cans because of a ridge of plastic about half way up the tube. You can shave this off with a craft knife to make 'em fit.

It is our mission to bring on roller use to the masses. Rollers are fucking cool. You can get 3/4 inch ones that are really good for smaller funky writing. Big ones are good for massive pieces. You don't really need a tray. Overalls are good though if you don't want to travel home covered in paint. Look after the rollers well, coz once they go hard you can't really use em.

Brushes

Are slow, so I don't use them so much (fiddly things, outlining, or alongside rollers if the surface is super uneven.) But there is one pixi who only ever uses a brush and it works fine anywhere thats not too on-top. Wicked for legal walls. Brushed graffiti looks super-cool I reckon. Fuck spray-paint snobs. Brushes are where its at.

Gloves

You can get latex ones from car part shops. You can nick not latex ones from hospitals. Remember to take them off after you've finished. I guess they're used to it, but if you forget you'll get funny looks when you're buying milk off the milkman at five in the morning.

Stencils

Easy to make from photocopies. Use acetate, card or lino, even thick paper and have some kind of folder to put them in (plastic folders are best as card sticks and rips easy). You'll need to gaffa them to the wall if you are on your own. Mind they don't stick to the folder when the paint is wet.

Pens

You can get wet chalk pens for writing on shop windows and black boards. They don't come of when they dry unless you scrub 'em. We got them from friends working in offies. You can get them in motorists shops. They don't work at all in the wet, or on porous surfaces. Good for the inside of bus stops, sitex, that sort of thing. Worth carrying one around with you. Permanent markers work too, but they're small and generally black.

Surface/Location

You can paint on virtually anything, don't restrict yourself to walls and trains. Knowing which paint to use on which surface is trial and error. As a general guide though:

Concrete = Good. Its butt ugly anyway so you can't go wrong. Its also about the right smoothness and porousness. Spray paint will soak into very porous surfaces, so it is good to put a layer of emulsion on first as a primer.

Metal (trains, buses, sitex) = good. Watch for serious drippage though. Same with the shiny subway surfaces.

So far as locations go, be as imaginative and cheeky as possible. You might wanna do a quick piece where loads of people will see it, like a motorway bridge, or a more detailed piece where people will stop and have a look, like down an alley/carpark/river bridge. Try bus stops, cash points, bins, walls, pavements, garage doors, roofs, billboards, fur shops, posh hotels, embassies, McDonald's etc. etc. The more you have to pretend to be a ninja, the more fun it is. For example...some pixies snuck, (all the time pretending to be ninjas..) inside Campsfield Immigration Detention Centre and wrote "FREEDOM" on an inner wall facing the inmates sleeping quarters, some more wrote anti-nuke stuff all around the Aldermarston Military base.

Some hints

- 1) Take a mate. Its more fun, and then you have a lookout. Know what you're going to paint before you get there; you don't want to be hanging around trying to think of something. Sometimes it helps to carry a drawing around with you. If in doubt, have a few quickies in the back of your mind incase of mental block. Anti-war slogans, local campaigns, web addresses (URL's) are good. Organise yo'self, make sure you got all the nozzles, colour etc. and you know where they are. Remember something to open paint tins with. Don't paint too much stuff near your house. it'll make you paranoid.
- 2) It'll be dark when you're out. So write in big letters on your paint cans what colour it is. Saves lighter fuel.
- 3) Booze...get the mixture right. Too much alcohol and your piece will look shit. Whether or not you remember doing it, it'll still be there in the morning (in the busiest, CCTV'd, most on-top spot next to the cop shop on the high street..) and all your mates will know it was you. Live with the shame, or risk community service and go and paint over it tomorrow night.
- 4) One Crime at a time. I reckon this is a good tip if you don't wanna get pulled over for having no lights on yer bike when you're covered from head to foot in paint, carrying all your stencils and wearing latex housebreaking gloves. Might as well leave your drugs at home as well. Also, its a good idea to keep your house free of incriminating stuff, even sketches. Especially if your house is likely to get busted anyway. May sound paranoid, but people do get seriously nicked for painting sometimes. Years in a few cases. Even if you don't get charged you don't want the hassle of having the police kicking your door in at three in the morning. [Read our defendants' guide to arrest](#)

Taken from the [Pinka Punka Pixies website](#)

Edited by libcom

Guide to giving speeches and presentations



Tips and advice of public speaking, making speeches and giving presentations effectively.

Giving speeches and presentations is one of the most basic ways that an activist can communicate their ideas. Every activist should have at least a little experience with public speaking.

Speaking tips

Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows you care about doing well. But, too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here's how you can control your nervousness and make effective, memorable presentations:

1. *Know the room.* Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and try practicing using the microphone and any visual aids.
2. *Know the audience.* Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
3. *Know your material.* If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech and revise it if necessary.
4. *Relax.* Ease tension by going for a walk, doing some basic stretching, chatting with colleagues.
5. *Realise that people want you to succeed.* Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, and informative. They don't want you to fail.
6. *Don't apologise.* If you mention your nervousness or apologise for any problems you think you have with your speech, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Avoid pointing out your own imagined inadequacies, your audience has a higher opinion of you than you think.
7. *Concentrate on the message - not the medium.* Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and outwardly toward your message and your audience. Your nervousness will dissipate.
8. *Turn nervousness into positive energy.* Harness your nervous energy and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm.
9. *Gain experience.* Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking.

Tips for handling Question and Answer sessions

If you don't hear the question or understand it, ask the questioner to repeat it.

1. Try to keep calm, even if your audience is hostile or upset.
2. Always respect the questioner, even if you do not like the question or the manner in which it is posed.

3. Don't feel offended if someone asks you a question that you feel you already answered in your presentation or a previous question, they may not have heard or understood the information previously presented.

4. Honesty is the best policy, if you don't know the answer to something, admit it - you can offer to get in contact the person later with an answer.

Excerpted by libcom from 10 Tips For Successful Public Speaking with modifications by Shawn Ewald and Handling Q & A.

Guide to setting up a local newsletter



A guide with tips and advice on how to set up a newsletter in your local area to cover issues that affect local residents.

Organise a meeting

You've talked about it down the pub with a few mates. You all think it's a great idea. There are a few more people you can think of who'd be interested. So just get on with it - it's not going to happen otherwise. Fix a date, time and venue (could be someone's house, it's not a public meeting). Leave other possibilities wide open. It's important for everyone to have had a say in the shaping of the project from the start.

Get it all sorted

There's no point in having your founding moment and then coming away having vaguely agreed to do something soon. Probably. When we've got our act together. The minimum you should have agreed is a name and address, which will in turn enable you to set up a building society account in your newsletter's name. We use a PO Box, which costs about fifty quid a year. We had to chip in up front to start it but donations over the next 12 months covered the renewal (just). It would probably be better to have an actual local street address, not just to save cash but so people could drop stuff in by hand and bypass the official mail system.

Think of a good name

OK, maybe you can't take that advice from a group with a title like The Pork-Bolter. But it is a genuinely historical nickname for Worthing people and the piggie identity has provided us with hours of puns. The main requirements are that it should be a local name and that it shouldn't put people off reading your stuff by being too overtly political. This may not come naturally to most would-be rabble-rousers, but you are addressing ordinary people here and not fellow subversive scum. On the same lines, there is no need to invent a separate name for the group producing the newsletter. It may well prove an own goal to declare that ON THE

BOG - What's Going Down in Little Bogweed is published by the South Bogshire Emiliano Zapata Revolutionary Militia Propaganda Outreach Cell.

The nitty-gritty

Thinking of a name is the fun bit and may well take up 95% of your opening meeting (if you let it). But you've also got to start thinking about boring detail, like what size is the newsletter going to be, how often will it come out, how many will you get printed and so on. Without wanting to come across all sycophantic, we were greatly inspired by the Sch-you-know-who in our inception and had no qualms about blatantly copying their format. You'd be amazed at how much you can fit on a double-sided piece of A4. As far as frequency is concerned, once a month seems about right for us. Quantity is obviously limited by funds. Try getting 500 done to start with, then up it to 1,000 or more if your distribution is working. Another advantage of double-sided A4 format is that it is easy to photocopy and you may be able to supplement your print run with the help of office-worker volunteers (and various people will be busy copying and distributing them round their mates and colleagues who you won't even know about ...).

Printing

Cheap photocopying/printing is hard to come by, but very useful. Don't just rush out to the nearest High Street print shop. Ask around for ideas about cheaper options. Try your local student union or college print department or local resource centre. If all else fails, why not bring out the newsletter at whatever cost and appeal to readers for leads on cheaper printing. You never know who may come forward.

Paying for it

You'll probably find yourselves fulfilling this role. But spread between the group members it doesn't come to much. If you meet at someone's home instead of in the pub, you'll have probably paid for the next issue from what would have been spent at the bar. Other costs may well be covered by donations/subscriptions once you've got going.

Getting it out

Distribution is a piece of cake when it's free. It's just a question of getting them all out into the hands of the local population. You can do that most directly by standing in the town centre and thrusting them rudely into people's hands (with a smile on your face). And you can leave them in public places like the library and town hall (small amounts but frequently - they tend to get removed). Ask in shops if you can leave a pile on the counter. And in pubs. You'll be surprised at the positive reaction to a lively local newsletter. Keen people should also be able to subscribe for a small charge to cover postage (though since they're local you could drop them in by hand and save the stamp).

Contents

You'd forgotten about that small detail, hadn't you? What do you put in the bloody thing? This should not really be a problem for anyone who's got as far as even thinking about doing a newsletter. First of all you read all the mainstream local papers. And then you get very angry with all the stuff the council's up to and the MP is spouting on about. And then you don't just forget about it and resolve not to read annoying local papers anymore, but instead you cut out the relevant bits and bring them along to the next newsletter meeting. And everyone else says how crap the council is and takes the piss a bit and someone else has cut a bit out of The Big Issue which sort of fits in. Meanwhile, a person with biro-manipulating skills writes down the best bits. And lo, the contents start to emerge. Add in your own little campaigns (anti-GM, anti-CCTV, anti-negative attitudes etc), plus titbits about worthy local groups (Friends of the Earth, animal welfare, etc, etc) and you've got a newsletter.

Campaigns

Gives a positive focus amidst all the sniping from the sidelines. But obviously depends on what's happening locally. And what you're into.

Keep it local

Forget the recommendation to act locally and think globally. You have to start thinking locally as well. Only then can you go on to draw your political conclusions. For instance, trying to persuade people here that global capitalism is a bad thing because it is destroying the Amazon rainforests is a waste of time. But talk to them about the way that money-grabbing property developers are allowed to build all over green spaces on the edge of your town and your readers will understand why you then call for an end to the rule of greed and money over people and countryside. In your newsletter your views can clearly be seen as common sense. You are normal and the council/property developers/government are the outsiders - reversing the way radical views are conventionally presented. Use words like 'we' and 'our' a lot.

Have a laugh

A jokey approach makes people read your newsletter and explodes certain ill-founded stereotypes about types involved in radical political initiatives. Could be a problem, though, if your group does in fact happen to be entirely composed of humourless left-wing gits.

Law-abiding

Remember that you can get done for libel if you make certain claims about individuals. Get round this with humourous digs and heavy use of satire and sarcasm (think Private Eye, Have I Got News For You, etc). It is worth knowing that you cannot libel a council - so go for it!

Media

You yourselves are the new media for the town, so you don't need to worry about publicity. But if they want to give a rival organ a boost, that's just dandy.

Carry on publishing

There will be ups and downs. New people will join your circle. Others will drift away. It might seem like nobody's taking any notice of you at all. But in fact your subversive message will be permeating the very fabric of your community. It's got to be worth it.

From The Pork-Bolter, Worthing, UK

Guide to starting your own zine



Tips and advice on starting a zine-style publication, from format and content to distribution and finance.

Are you ready to do a zine?

This is probably the most important question you should ask yourself when you're considering doing a zine -- are you really ready to do one? Doing a zine can take up a lot of your time and become a big responsibility. There's no reason that you should have to do a whole zine -- if you aren't sure you can handle a zine on your own, consider maybe contributing to zines that you like or getting a couple friends to do one with you.

Also, just because anyone can do a zine doesn't mean they should. Not everyone is suited to the kind of work that goes into zines, and there's a lot of forms of creativity that just don't translate well into a zine. That said, if you have a lot of ideas and you think this is the way you want to express them, here's how to do it!

Content

What kind of stuff will be in your zine? Obviously, before you start actually making up pages you need to have some idea what you're going to put on them. Start collecting clipped stuff, pictures, notes on things you want to write. Your zine can be about any subject you want (or all the subjects you want). Once you've decided what you're going to put in your zine, start working on it -- it's a lot easier to do a zine with a bunch of work you've already finished than to try and do one from scratch.

Size and format

Once you've decided what you're going to put in your zine, you need to decide what it's going to look like – what size, and what format you'll do it in.

There are lots of formats to do a zine in. As you order zines, you'll see that some people use "nicer" printing methods -- better paper, or color. But for a first zine, your best bet is photocopying. It's easy, you can make up copies as you need them (instead of having them all sit in piles in your closet) and the art looks clean because of the white paper. Half-size zines like this look nice, especially if they're stapled properly. You also can experiment with colored paper for the whole thing or the cover, or even an insert. The two bad things about photocopying: Collating (putting the Xeroxed pages in order) can be a real pain (a zine I worked on once had 24 full-size pages, and we made 500 copies -- it took FOREVER to put them together), and if you have a lot of pages it can get very expensive. The biggest

advantage is that you can put out a zine like this with practically no money -- just get a few copies together at a time, after you get an order with money in it.

When you're copying your pages, you can do almost any size zine -- the folded-in-half size is pretty much the standard. You can also do full pages and just staple them together, or even do the pages on 11" x 17", fold them in half and staple, and voila! a zine that looks printed. Other variations I've seen: legal-size Xeroxes folded in half (makes a squarish zine) and pages that have been folded in quarters and even sixths, stapled and trimmed to make mini-zines. Remember that the size page you use will affect the number of pages in your zine -- if you do a half-size zine, every double-sided copy = 4 zine pages, so you have to have a page count that you can divide by four (8, 16, 24, etc.).

Plan on starting small -- start off with an issue with a really low page count to save money, and if you get enough to put out future issues, then start adding pages. One girl I know does incredibly tiny Xeroxed zines, but she also does a new one every time she has something new to say or show, whether it's a week later or a month. A zine doesn't have to be big to be good, that's for sure.

Layout

Once you've decided what's going into the zine, you can start worrying about making up your pages. You don't have to make the pages in the correct order, but you do need to make them the correct size. Make up a bunch of "flats" (base pages you glue everything up on) -- you can use any kind of paper for this. (If you are doing a full-size zine you might want to consider a heavy paper, like card stock, for the base.) Make the pages the size of your zine pages -- if it's a half-size zine just cut 8-1/2" x 11" paper in half, and so on. Number the pages on the back or right on the flats if you want page numbers in your zine. When that's all done, you can paste up anything you want onto the pages. (Keep in mind that a Xerox machine will cut off about 1/8-1/4" on the edges, so don't put anything important too near the sides.)

Next figure out how many pages you're going to have, and start working out what you want to put on each page. If your zine is full size, it's pretty simple, but if it's a half-sized zine, you're going to have to lay them out and copy them in the right order for them to come out the way you want. The easiest way to do this is to make up a blank zine, the length that yours is going to be. Fold the pages in half and make it the same size as yours. Go from front to back like you're reading it, and number the pages as you go. You can also make notes on what you want to put on each page. When you're finished making up all your individual pages, you can take it apart, and just glue the flats down on the blank numbered pages wherever you want them to go. Now you have a double-sided original, which will make it easier to remember how to Xerox them.

The stuff on the pages

Text

The text (writing) in your zine can be done any way you want -- from handwritten to nicely typeset.

Handwriting is an option if your handwriting is VERY legible (ask someone else if you aren't sure how legible it is) and you use a good black pen. Don't use colored pens, and never use a ball-point. Typing on anything from an old manual typewriter to some spiffy new electronic one will always work. Try marking the outline of the area you want filled with type in pencil on a regular size sheet of paper, and then type directly on it, following the outline. Then erase the pencil, cut it out and paste down. And if you have access to a desktop computer or even a good word processor (if you don't know anyone with one, try school) you can actually typeset stuff for your zine.

Art

As far as art goes, anything that's black and white (even if the "white" part is grayish or yellowed), like drawings or stuff you've cut out of magazines, will usually come out just fine. You can photocopy most colors, too -- try different things out. And you can copy almost anything to make a background pattern -- I've put half my clothes on a copying machine at one time or another. Experiment! One of the big advantages to photocopying is that you can reproduce so many things with no extra cost or effort.

Photos

Photographs should be black and white, although most color pictures will reproduce okay. Again, you'll have to experiment. They should be as focused and clear as possible. You can either paste the actual photo into place if it's the right size, or you can Xerox it and paste the Xerox into your page. If you want them to really look like photos, you can get a "half-tone" made. A half-tone makes a "continuous-tone image" (like a photo or pencil drawing, things with grays in them) into a black-and-white dot pattern that looks like a photo, but actually isn't. If you look closely at any (black and white) photo in a newspaper, you'll see that they are really made up of a lot of little dots. Halftones should be pretty easy for you to get, but they usually aren't cheap. The best thing would be to look in the yellow pages -- try printers, graphics, maybe advertising production if they have it. Any place that says it has "full production services" is a very likely bet. Spend an afternoon calling them up and asking if they do halftones. Most of them will say no, but in case you find a lot, ask them a test price -- ask them how much, say, a 8" x 10" 85-line-screen halftone would cost. Then of course pick the cheapest and closest place you found. Or if a place seemed really friendly or helpful, it might be worth a little extra to go there. (An 85-line-screen means that the piece of equipment they use to make the half-tone has 85 lines per inch -- there's actually 85 rows of dots in each inch of the screen.) But when Xeroxing, you can use a finer or a coarser screen -- a finer screen would look more like a photo, but it might not reproduce as well. If you wanted a big dot effect you could get one done on a coarser screen, they usually go down to 45-line screens at most places. Ask them to show you some examples. Also, if you have access to someone's computer with a scanner, you can scan in the photos and print out a half-tone. Not quite as perfect, but a lot cheaper!

Pasting up pages

Once you've got all your contents organized and ready to be put together, start pasting up the pages (gluing everything down) one at a time. Don't feel rushed, you can do it in fits and starts for as long as you want -- you're not on a deadline here.

You can use scissors to cut things out, or move up to x-acto knives (special knives for doing crafts and things -- you've probably seen one before, all office supply stores have them). I personally recommend the "X-ACTO gripster", which has a rubber coating on the part you hold. They're much cooler. When you cut things with an x-acto, put the paper you're cutting on top of a piece of cardboard or something similar. It keeps you from cutting up the tabletop, and also makes the cutting much easier.

Paste things down with glue sticks (you can get these from any office supply also -- I recommend the purple-tinted UHU glue stick, it's my favorite), not a regular glue like Elmer's or something -- those wet glues will make the paper buckle up really bad. Make sure you give whatever you're gluing down a good coat or it might fall off when it dries! Once you've put something down on your flat you can wiggle it around and even peel it back up if you have to, but only for about the first 10 seconds. Be careful! Make sure you're putting things where you want them. Be neat or be sloppy -- look at other zines to get inspired.

When you've finished up the individual pages, you need to get them ready to copy. If your zine is full-sized, all you have to do is put them in order. If it's half-sized (or some other wacky size), you're going to have to make originals that are the same size as the paper you're copying them onto, and in the correct order. Follow the directions under "LAYOUT" to make up your originals.

Printing (i.e. photocopying)

Once your originals are completely finished, you can go get your double-sided copies made. (If you do not have double sided originals, be very clear when placing your order if you don't do the copies yourself.) Do as many as you think you'll need, but don't feel like you have to make too many. You can always get more done. Plus, it's easier to collate smaller numbers at a time. Once you've got your copies back, you need to collate them (put them in order), and fasten them somehow. You can staple them together, leave the pages loose but folded in the right order, punch holes in the center and tie them together -- or come up with something entirely new. (A lot of people ask how you staple a big zine right in the center -- the secret is a long-reach stapler that is at least 12" long. A lot of copy shops have one available for people to use, and if you're going to be doing a lot of zines, you can find them at any big office supply place.) All done? Voila! You are a proud parent.

Finance - budgeting your zine

I'd say that money is a consideration for almost everyone doing zines (unless you're independently wealthy or you work at a Kinko's). With your zine do you expect to: (A) lose money; (B) break even; or, (C) make a little money? If you expect to make a little money, well, think again. If you expect to lose money (not much of course), good for you. I lose money on most of my projects. But I consider the non-financial rewards to be more than worth it. (What are they, you ask? Well, mail, other zines, positive feedback, new friends, stuff like that...) And if you want to break even, well, you've got a really good chance!

You need to figure out a balance between your cost and your price -- you don't want to charge too much, but you don't want to go totally broke either. Your cost will obviously depend on the number of pages in your zine. Your price should be as low as you can afford, and will depend on your distribution. Keep in mind that \$1 is a standard zine price -- if you're charging \$3 (even if that's your cost), a lot of people simply won't risk \$3 on something they've never seen before. Keep your zine small and keep the price low.

For example, a typical half-size zine, at 20 pages (5 double-sided Xeroxes) will cost you 65¢ at Kinko's (if you find a cheaper place, use it!!) If you charge \$1 for it, you'll make a little money when you sell it in person, break even if you sell it in a store, and lose a little bit when you mail it. It should come out about even. If your zine's a little bigger, you might want to put \$1 on the cover, and charge \$1 + postage by mail. Like I said, sell it for as little as you possibly can -- and when pricing it you should also take into consideration how many you plan on doing. Losing 25¢ each on 50 copies is a few day's lunch money. But 25¢ each on hundreds of copies could break you for sure.

Distribution

There are several ways to get a zine out into the world, including: giving out/selling copies yourself (at shows or school or whatever); doing mail-order yourself; having other mail-order/distribution places handle copies; and, selling it in stores.

Distributing it yourself involves two possibilities, doing it in person or through the mail. In person you have the most options, you can sell it or give it away, and even sell it to some people and give it to others. Doing mail-order yourself is the most popular approach by far -- you need to figure out a price that will include postage and then get exposure for your zine through ads and reviews. (You can either charge the cover price, or add extra for shipping. A

lot of zines will make it on one 32-cent stamp, others need 55-cents postage. Take a copy, or a blank one of the same weight, down to the post office and find out.)

Selling directly to stores (or more likely, putting on consignment) is also an option. Any store that you or a friend can get to (on a regular basis) is a good place to try and put copies on consignment. You may have to negotiate the amount with each store individually, but you should get 60-75% of the cover price. Don't take less than 50%, ever. You'll have to make up a consignment slip and have it signed by someone with authority, unless they have one already. Usually you set a time limit on the consignment, and at the end of that time, they have to give you money for all the copies they don't have and give you back whatever's left. But you can work this out depending on your relationship with the store. There's lots of combinations of this depending on what you can afford and how into it you are. You could give it away locally in stores or at shows, but charge for it by mail. Or only do it by mail. Do whatever you feel comfortable with.

Getting exposure

If you're selling your zine by mail, there are two ways to get people to order: through ads and through reviews.

Ads are always good. A lot of smaller zines will trade ads for free, and classified ads in bigger zines can get a really good response.

Reviews are very important -- not only can you get orders from them, but good reviews will help you get ads, distributors and encourage people to pick your zine up if they see it somewhere. Other places you send copies to will be determined by the content of your zine. Judge for yourself whether you think the readers of a particular publication would be likely to like your zine. When sending a review copy, it's a MUST to attach/enclose a note which clearly states your name, the name of the zine, your address, and mail-order price of the zine.

Trade copies with other small zines like yours, especially if they list other zine addresses. (And list addresses of zines you like in return.)

Whatever you decide to do, remember that this is supposed to be FUN. If you start getting burnt out, or sick of doing zines, then stop. Fill your orders, but don't feel like you have to keep putting out new issues. If you want to change the name or content of your zine, go right ahead! There are no rules -- you can do whatever you want!

By Sarah Dyer

Interview conducting guide



Tips and advice on carrying out interviews with people for articles, publications, books, etc.

Interviews can be a useful tool to aid publishing and media efforts. Think of them as an opportunity to get information you don't already know. It is a particularly useful way of relieving the pressure on people intensely involved in a particular struggle who don't have the time to report on their activities and perspectives.

You should research your subject first. It may be that your interviewee is a shop steward in a workplace on strike, or was active in the Miners Support Group in your town in the 1980s. Research this first so that you are sure you are asking appropriate questions. Leave them open - this means you should avoid questions that can be answered yes or no. An example:

Avoid: Did you support the printers at Wapping?

Instead use: How did you support the printers at Wapping?

The second example will lead into specific activities - and some of these may be particularly interesting. For example, Albert Meltzer, then a few years off retirement and active in the print-workers union, had his car "break down" in the road leading up to Wapping, thus blocking the scab lorries. Only the second approach would have revealed this. And of course, be prepared that your interview might go off on tangents! Interviewees will regularly say something you weren't expecting or need to know more about.

Try to put the interviewee at their ease. Be relaxed - someone is far more likely to say something interesting or new if they are feeling comfortable. You should also be careful about anything that might be incriminating or put others at risk.

There may be times when you are doing a hostile interview, or one with someone who you might be critical of (an anarchist who is standing for election, for example), be particularly probing on areas you think are weaknesses. However, don't let your criticisms derail the interview - if anything plan it so that the uncritical stuff comes first.

If interviewing someone in person, as opposed to by email it is a good idea to record it - particularly if it is one done on the spur of the moment. Unless you can do proper shorthand, you will find a dictaphone, tape-or digital recorder useful. You should get the interviewee to agree to be recorded. I once did an interview on a demo by scribbling it down on a pad but it's not a method I would recommend.

Interviews should be written up as they occurred and then use this as the basis for the final article to be published. Even a straight question and answer format will benefit from this. Think about whether the interview is for publication or for background research. A longer article can quote from the interview. The original transcript should be kept - both in case there are challenges to your reporting and as a part of general working class oral history. (The KSL, website below, would welcome such transcripts as an aid to research - see the oral history article).

Suitable people to interview include:

- * Participants in specific struggles, past and present. This is particularly the case if you are writing an article about something in the past.
- * People with expertise in an area of knowledge - e.g. an anarchist midwife about proposed changes to maternity wards, a railway engineer about a train crash, an ecologist about the impact of a new road.
- * Political opponents - within specific struggles and possibly generally if there is a good angle.

I hope this has fired your interest in talking to people about their experiences and finding out more.

By Martin H, the [Kate Sharpley Library](#)

News report writing guide



A guide to writing news stories for the independent and alternative media.

The first thing to remember about reporting for a libertarian or anarchist newspaper or magazine is that it is **not** propaganda.

Western consumers are far too media savvy to put up with preachy, badly written rhetoric. If you want to spread the word (hallelujah) then fine, go down the pub or knock on doors and ask people if they've heard the good news yet. Don't waste time writing it down and sending it to newspapers.

The only thing between us and the mainstream media is that we are out to tell the truth, and they are mostly out to obscure it. Don't waste that basic strength by muddying the waters with excessive comment.

With any publication though, a certain amount of bias is inevitable - that's why we wear our ideology on our sleeve. Media audiences all understand this, and if we wish to make an impact with what we write it must be able to stand up to the scrutiny of cynics and people looking to find fault. That means it must be fact, not opinion.

Have confidence enough to let people make their own conclusions.

With this in mind, here are some basic tips for reporting technique:

Questions

There are six questions every journalist should ask about every news story. Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. The most important of these is Why, but find out the other stuff first, as it is the basis for all further questions.

Think about the angle you want to come at it from. For instance, 2 million people are starving in the UK. Possible angles: UK government/society is letting down the elderly, a tragic but unavoidable loss, two million homes may be freed up for young families etc...

Any of these can be made into articles, but it is important to know where you are coming from when you make up your list of questions.

Motive is vitally important when talking about any misdeeds, and given the subject matter, your subject's motives will almost invariably be money and power.

Follow those and read other lefties who have written about it - there often are some - and it will give you an idea of what other questions to ask.

Always get paper, wherever you go. Contact numbers, official documents, stuff lying on the table where it shouldn't be, all of it. The more facts you have that have been written down, the better able you will be to justify the article you've written.

Record conversations, either in written form, or via a tape recorder. Preferably both. The UK has the toughest libel law in the world and if you are trying to get into print in any paper with

a circulation in four figures this becomes an all-important factor. I'll be writing about the basics of the law later, but remember the only sure-fire defence against libel is provable truth.

Research

Above all, don't fall into the trap of finding an easy answer which fits into your world view and then writing it up as unassailable fact. Dig, dig and dig some more. You aren't writing this for a wage and you don't have an editor forcing you to get as many stories done as possible.

There is no excuse for laziness in your research (though equally, if you have a deadline for Christ's sake stick to it, there's nothing worse for an editor than slotting in an article to the paper and then being let down).

One of the famous phrases that hover around in even mainstream circles is 'If you're not pissing someone off, you aren't doing it properly'. The other phrase is 'a good journalist has a little literary ability, a plausible manner and ratlike cunning'.

Both make a good point. Don't get put off by someone making an angry denial, that just means either you haven't got your facts straight (so here's their chance to correct you) or you're on to something.

Equally don't go in with all guns blazing looking for a fight, people will always be more likely to talk to you if they think you're on their side.

Pictures

If possible, always take or find a picture of the event you are reporting on. Pictures sell papers, and not just that, they give readers a much clearer view of what you are talking about. Where you can, have a camera with you at all times, preferably digital (for easier storage, transfer and not insignificantly, so you don't have to get worrying photos developed). Try and get wide angle shots so the sub-editor has more to work with, and a high pixel resolution so it's big enough to look good on a page.

Court reporting

Do not report on active court proceedings unless you have taken an NCTJ or media law course, or have learned the ropes thoroughly from someone extremely experienced. It can end up putting you, the paper publishing you and their distributors into bankruptcy. You can even end up in jail if you don't know what you're doing.

Writing with structure

Once you have all the relevant information, the structure of the story is very important. Most professionals have a mental checklist:

First paragraph: A very quick summation of the story (less than 3 lines for libcom.org/news), including the 'hook' (the most interesting part of the story, the gimmick that makes it newsworthy).

Second paragraph: Explanation of basic facts.

Third paragraph: For preference, a quote from a source who is likely to know what they're talking about (this is to supplement the fact you are a journalist, not an expert in the issue you're reporting on).

Fourth paragraph: More information and introduction of the other side - there **always** is one.

Fifth paragraph: Quote from the other person.

Subsequent paragraphs can have more quotes or info depending on the story, but **always** order it in descending level of importance/interest. Editors cut from the bottom up, and people read from the top down.

Depending on the importance of the story it will warrant more or less attention. The current policy of Freedom is to give Features anything from 1,200-1,500 words, Headline articles and leads 600, Page second stories 450, page thirds 300 and Nibs (news in brief) 100-150. However if and when the paper changes to become a tabloid format, these numbers are likely to drop.

Be concise. If a story can be adequately explained in 50 words, then do so. A good exercise is looking at news articles in the papers and working out how you could sum them up in ten words.

Audience

Sad but true, most people rank their interest in the news as follows: 10,000 dead on another continent = 1,000 dead on the same continent = 100 dead in your country = 10 dead in your county = 1 celebrity eating grubs in a jungle. We can probably disregard the last bit, as it's far better covered by the mainstream press but the rest is still, unfortunately, relevant. The more local it is, the more interested people will be.

People in general expect a certain style of writing from newspapers.

This doesn't mean writing in stereotypes and clichés, it means not using long words when short ones will do (that's not a patronising attitude, it's just polite, I absolutely hate it when I have to translate from 'clever' to layman's terms - why say 'endeavour' when you can say 'try?').

More specifically, your writing style and tone should be aimed squarely at the market you are trying to capture. Freedom currently aims at people used to reading lengthier, more informative pieces, but has been looking to shorten at least some of its articles to accommodate a wider audience (hence the nibs section for example on page 2).

To get an idea of the audience you want to try for, read the mainstream press. They're arseholes, but they've been refining their techniques, with a great deal of thought, money and effort, for 150 years. The UK press know how to get a point across better than anyone else on the planet. We are up against a massively well-oiled media machine, which cannot be dismissed. They have all the funds, all the manpower, the backing of every major business and every governmental source. Don't, whatever you do, dismiss them as a load of crap.

Epilogue

This is all dependent on you personally having the confidence to research and write about subjects you are interested in. The Freedom collective is made up of only four or five regulars working every other Sunday, and we have full-time jobs.

As has been sharply demonstrated by the crisis at Black Flag and the lack of interested faces at the Book fair's editorial meeting last year, anarchism's alternative media is in desperate need of more help, or it simply will not survive.

Taken from the [Freedom newspaper](#) 'Welcome Pack'

Pirate radio guide



A technical primer and guide with advice about micropower broadcasting and other aspects of running a pirate radio station.

Many people still assume that an FM broadcast station consists of rooms full of equipment costing tens of thousands of dollars. The Micropower Broadcasting, Free Radio Movement has shown this to be untrue.

Micropower broadcasting uses FM transmitters whose power output is in the range of 1/2 to 40 watts. Such transmitters have a physical size that is not greater than that of your average brick. These transmitters combined with other equipment including inexpensive audio mixers, consumer audio gear, a power supply, filter and antenna enable any community to put its own voice on the air at an average cost of \$1000-\$1500. This is far more affordable than the tens or hundreds of thousands required by the current FCC regulatory structure.

All of the technical aspects of putting together a micropower broadcasting station are covered in the following material. It is important to note that the main argument the FCC uses against micropower broadcasting is the issue of interference with other broadcast services.

Interference is a valid concern. By using equipment that is frequency stable and properly fitted with harmonic suppression filters along with good operating procedures and standards, the FCC's argument can be effectively neutralized.

Further, the technical aspects of micropower broadcasting require some basic knowledge in the areas of electronics and broadcast practices. Hopefully, this primer will be able to convey some of this knowledge to you. If you are unsure of your abilities try to find someone who has the technical experience to help you. It is hoped that as this movement grows a network of people with the required technical skills will be formed to assist in the process of empowering every community with its own voice. If you are a person with engineering or technical experience, please contact Free Radio Berkeley to become part of this network.

Finding a frequency

Before you can proceed any further you must determine if there are any available frequencies in your area. Due to frequency congestion in the large urban metroplexes such as London, Paris, LA, NYC, etc. this may be a bit difficult. You will need several items to do a frequency search: a listing of all the FM radio stations within a 50-70 mile radius of your area; and a digitally tuned radio. There are several databases on the world wide web which can be searched for FM radio stations in any given area. Here is one: www.airwaves.com/fccdb.html

Channel separation is the biggest problem. FM broadcast frequencies are assigned a frequency channel 200 kilohertz wide. Good broadcasting practice requires that at least one channel of separation must exist on either side of the frequency you intend to use. In other words, if you have picked out 90.5 as a possible frequency then 90.3 and 90.7 should be clear

of any receivable signals. This is why a digital receiver is an important item for the frequency search.

Once you have a complete listing of all the FM radio stations look for possible frequencies with the appropriate channel spacing. Depending on topography, distance and the output power of the other stations certain "used" frequencies may in fact be open. Compile a list of the possible frequencies. Then, using a digital FM receiver with an external antenna, scan and check these frequencies. Do this from a number of locations and at varied times within the area you propose to cover. In most cases weak, intermittent, or static filled signals can be ignored and counted as either usable or providing the necessary channel separation.

Hopefully you will find at least one or two usable frequencies. If you live in a more rural area or some distance from a large urban area, finding a usable frequency should not be very difficult. 87.9 can be used as a frequency under two conditions. One, if there is not an existing station on 88.1, and two if there is not a TV Channel 6 being used in your area.

After compiling your list of possible frequencies have your friends check them out on their receivers or radios as well. It is helpful to do since a variety of different receivers will more accurately reflect the listening conditions in your area. After all of this you should have a workable list of frequencies to use.

Location of studio and transmitter

Before you set up the station an adequate location must be found. Since the antenna will be there as well a site with adequate elevation is required. Ideally the top of a hill or a spot somewhere on the side of hill overlooking the area of coverage is best. FM transmission is "line of sight" the transmitting antenna and receiving antenna must be able to "see" each other. Therefore, any large obstructions will have a tendency to block the signal path. Keep this in mind when choosing your location. If your site is a 1 to 3 story building, a 30 foot push up style mast attached and guyed to the roof or a TV antenna style tower bracketed to the side of the building will be needed to provide adequate height for the antenna. At the very least you need to have the antenna at least 40-50 feet above the ground. In some areas a building permit may be needed to attach a mast or tower to a building.

It is good practice to keep the transmitter some distance from the audio studio since the radio frequency emissions from the transmitter can get into the audio equipment and cause noise and hum. Your transmitter should be set up in another room, attic space, etc. as close to the antenna as possible. Keep the distance from the transmitter to antenna as short as possible to minimize signal loss in the coaxial cable feeding the antenna. These are some of the basic issues regarding site selection. Landlords, room mates, leases etc. are your problem.

FM transmitters

FM is an abbreviation for Frequency Modulation. Modulation is how information is imparted to a radio frequency signal. In the case of FM the audio signal modulates what is called the carrier frequency (which is the frequency of the broadcast signal) by causing it to shift up and down ever so slightly in response to the level of the audio signal. An FM radio receives this signal and extracts the audio information from the radio frequency carrier by a process called demodulation.

Modulation of the signal takes place within the FM broadcast transmitter. The transmitter consists of several different sections: the oscillator, phase locked loop, and gain stages. Generation of the broadcast carrier frequency is the responsibility of the oscillator section. Tuning (as distinct from modulation) or changing the frequency of the oscillator section is either done electronically or manually. For a practical radio station that will be operated for more than a few minutes, it is almost essential to have the tuning done under electronic control since free running or manually tuned oscillators will drift in frequency due to

temperature and inherent design limitations. This is an important consideration in selecting a transmitter. Since one of the goals is to deprive the FCC of technical objections to micropower broadcasting it is critical to have transmitters that stay on frequency and do not drift. This, of course, rules out using transmitters based on free running oscillators.

Frequency control brings us to the next section. Oscillator frequency drift is corrected by a circuit known as a phase lock loop (PLL) controller. In essence, it compares the output frequency of the oscillator to a reference frequency. When the frequency starts to drift it applies a correction voltage to the oscillator which is voltage tuned, keeping it locked to the desired frequency. In a PLL circuit the frequency is selected by setting a series of small switches either on or off according to the frequency setting chart that comes with the transmitter. In some cases the switch array may be replaced by 4 dial-up switches that show a number for the FM frequency of transmission, i.e. 100.1 for 100.1 MHz. Even simpler, some units have a display like a digital radio with up and down buttons for changing frequency.

One part of the oscillator section, the voltage tuning circuit, serves a dual purpose. As described above it allows the oscillator to be electronically tuned. In addition, it is the means by which the broadcast carrier frequency is modulated by an audio signal. When the audio signal is applied to this section the variations in the audio signal voltage will cause the frequency of the oscillator to shift up and down. Frequency shifts brought about by audio modulation are ignored by the PLL controller due to the inherent nature of the circuit design. It is important not to over modulate the transmitter by applying an audio signal whose level is too great. Many transmitters are equipped with an input level control which allows one to adjust the degree of modulation. Further control of the audio level is provided by a compressor/limiter which is discussed in the studio section.

As the modulation level increases the amount of space occupied by the FM signal grows as well. It must be kept within a certain boundary or interference with adjacent FM broadcast channels will result. FCC regulations stipulate a maximum spread of plus or minus 75,000 cycles centered about the carrier frequency. Each FM channel is 200,000 cycles wide. Over modulation- the spreading of the broadcast signal beyond these boundaries- is known as splatter and must be avoided by controlling the modulation level. As a result the signal will be distorted and interference with adjacent channels will take place.

Following the oscillator section are a series of gain stages which buffer and amplify the signal, bringing it to a sufficient strength for FM broadcast purposes. In most cases this will be 1/2 to 1 watt of output power. This level is sufficient for a broadcast radius of 1-2 miles depending on circumstances. For increased power a separate amplifier or series of amplifiers are used to raise the power level even higher. Amplifiers are covered in the next part of this primer.

Transmitters are available in kit form from a number of different sources including Free Radio Berkeley,

Progressive Concepts, Paxis and Ramsey. Assembly requires a fair degree of technical skill and knowledge in most cases. Free Radio Berkeley offers an almost fully assembled 1/2 watt PLL transmitter kit requiring a minimal amount of assembly. Kits from Ramsey are rather debatable in terms of broadcast quality. An English firm Veronica makes some rather nice kits as well.

Amplifiers

Although 1/2 to 1 watt may be perfectly adequate for very localized neighborhood radio coverage, higher power will be required to cover larger areas such as a town or a portion of a large urban area. In order to increase the output power of a low power FM exciter or transmitter an amplifier or series of amplifiers are connected to the output of the transmitter.

Amplifiers are also referred to as amps, and should not be confused with the unit of current also called amps.

Amplifiers are much simpler in design and construction than a transmitter. Most of the amplifiers used in micropower broadcasting employ only one active device, an RF power transistor, per stage of amplification.

By convention most broadcast amplifiers have an input and output impedance of 50 ohms. This is similar to audio speakers having an impedance between 4 and 8 ohms. When an RF amplifier with a 50 ohm input impedance is attached to the 50 ohm output impedance of a transmitter this matching of impedances assures a maximum flow of electrical energy or power between the two units.

A mismatch between any elements in the chain from transmitter to amplifier to filter to antenna will reduce the efficiency of the entire system and may result in damage if the difference is rather large. Imagine the results if a high pressure water pipe 4 inches in diameter is forced to feed into a 1/2" water pipe with no decrease in the action of the pump feeding the 4 inch pipe. In an RF amplifier the RF power transistor will heat up and self-destruct under analogous conditions.

An RF power amplifier consists of an RF power transistor and a handful of passive components, usually capacitors and inductors which are connected in a particular topology that transforms the 50 ohm input and output impedances of the amplifier to the much lower input and output impedances of the RF power transistor. Detailed circuit theory of this interaction between the components is not covered in this primer.

Amplifiers can be categorized as either narrow band or broad band. Narrow band amplifiers are tuned to one specific frequency. Broad band amplifiers are able to work over a specified range of frequencies without tuning. Most of the amplifiers that have been used in micropower broadcasting are of the first type. A tunable amplifier can be a bit of a problem for those without much experience. In a typical tuned stage amplifier there will be two tuning capacitors in the input stage and two more in the output stage. If not correctly adjusted the transistor can produce unwanted sideband spurs at other frequencies both within and outside of the FM band.

To make set up easier for the average micropower broadcaster a broad band amplifier is preferable or one with a minimal amount of tuning stages. Several designs are available. One rather popular one is a 20-24 watt amplifier using a Phillips BGY33 broad band power amplifier module. It is a rather rugged device that requires no tuning and produces a full 20-24 watts output for 250 milliwatts of drive from the transmitter. Free Radio Berkeley has a kit based on this device. This kit includes an output filter as well which other vendors may not include in their kits. Regardless of the source, the BGY33 is not the most efficient device and requires a good sized heat sink for proper dissipation of heat, and the use of a cooling fan is strongly suggested as well.

If you buy a kit or transmitter package based on this device be certain to determine from the manufacturer that the BGY33 is mounted directly to the heat sink, not to a chassis panel with a heat sink on the other side of the chassis panel. It must directly contact the heat sink with a layer of heat sink heat compound between the module mounting flange and the heat sink surface.

Broad band designs are not as common due to the degree of design experience required to create a functional unit. It seems a number of kit providers are content not to optimize and improve their amplifier designs. Free Radio Berkeley is now offering amplifiers that are either no tune or minimal tune designs in several different ranges of power. Certain broad

band designs may be too wide in their range of frequency coverage and will amplify the harmonics equally well. For FM broadcast purposes the width of frequency coverage should be for only the FM band, about 20-25 Megahertz wide.

Selecting the right amount of power is rather important since you should only use enough power to cover the desired area. Unfortunately there is not an easy answer to the question of how much area a certain amount of power cover. Antenna height is very critical, 5 watts at 50 feet will not go as far as 5 watts at 500 feet.

Assuming you do not have a 10 story building or a convenient 500 foot hill to site your antenna and transmitter on, experience in urban environments has yielded the following rough guidelines. With based an antenna approximately 50 feet above the ground. 1/2 to 1 watt will yield an effective range of 1 to 3 miles, 5-6 watts will cover out to about 1-5 miles, 10-15 watts will cover up to 8 miles, 20-24 watts will cover up to 10-12 miles and 30-40 watts will cover up to 15 miles. Coverage will vary depending on terrain, obstructions, type of antenna, etc. If your antenna is very high above average terrain you will be able to go much further than the figures given above. Quality of the radios receiving your signal will be a determining factor as well. Since the power levels are rather low in comparison to other stations an external antenna on the receiver is highly suggested, especially an outdoor one.

It is very important to provide adequate cooling for RF amplifiers. This means using a properly sized heat sink and an external cooling fan. Heat sinks have heat dissipating fins which must be placed in an upward pointing direction. Overheating will cause premature failure of the transistor. A cooling fan, usually a 4 to 5 inch square box fan, will offer extra insurance. It should be placed so that the air flows over the fins of the heat sink.

Under no circumstances should an amplifier/transmitter be operated without a proper load attached to the output. Failure to do so can destroy the output transistor. When testing and tuning a dummy load is used to present a load of 50 ohms to the transmitter/amplifier. It is very bad practice to tune a unit with an antenna attached. Use a dummy load of proper wattage rating to match the transmitter output wattage.

An output filter must be used between the transmitter/amplifier and the antenna. Some amplifier kits come with a filter included, such as the 20 Watt FRB amplifier. These do not need an additional filter. More on this in the filter section.

Heavy gauge (12-16 AWG) insulated stranded wire is used to connect the amplifier to the power supply.

Observe correct polarity when making the connection. Reversing the polarity will result in catastrophic failure of the transmitter. Red is positive and black is negative or ground.

Power supplies

Most of the transmitters and amplifiers used in micro broadcasting require an input voltage of 12 to 14 volts DC. Higher power amplifiers (above 40 watts) require 24-28 volts DC. In a fixed location the voltage is provided by a power supply which transforms the house voltage of 110 volts AC to the proper DC voltage.

Power supplies are not only measured in terms of their voltage but current as well. A higher power amplifier is going to require a greater amount of input power as compared to a lower power amplifier. Output current is measured and specified as amps.. A power supply is selected on the basis of its continuos current output which should be higher than the actual requirements of the amplifier. Power supplies operated at their fully rated output will have a tendency to overheat under continuos operation. An amplifier which requires 8 amps will need a power supply with a 10 to 12 amp continuos capacity. In most cases the following ratings are suggested for transmitters requiring 13.8 volts.

1-5 Watt Transmitter 2-3 Amps

10-15 Watt Transmitter 5-6 Amps

20-24 BGY33 Based Unit 10 Amps

40 Watt Transmitter 12 Amps

Any power supply you use must have a regulated voltage output along with protection circuitry. Some reasonably priced brands include Pyramid, Triplite and Astron. Do not use any of the wall transformer type of power supplies. Such units are not adequate for this application. Higher power transmitters require power supplies with an output voltage of 28 volts. Astron is the best manufacturer of this type of power supply. A 75 watt transmitter will require a power supply with a current rating of 6-8 amps and 28 volts.

For mobile applications voltage can be fed from the cigarette lighter socket of a car with the correct plug and heavy gauge wiring. This may not work well in some newer vehicles which are reported to have some sort of current limit protection on the lighter socket. Check with an auto mechanic about this if you are in doubt.

Electrical systems on newer vehicles are rather sensitive and can be damaged if not properly understood.

Another problem with mobile operation is battery drain. A 20-40 watt transmitter running for 4-5 hours can deplete the battery to the point where the vehicle may not start. It is better to have separate battery running parallel to the charging system with an isolator. Isolators are available from Recreational Vehicle accessory suppliers. Use a high capacity deep discharge type of battery.

Lead acid batteries are not very benign. Acid can leak and spill on people, clothing and equipment. It is best to keep the battery in a plastic battery box. Vapors from the battery are explosive in confined areas. Keep this in mind for mobile vehicle operations. You might consider using a gel cell type of battery which is sealed and can not leak. These are a bit pricey but have far fewer problems. A good quality gel charger must be used to ensure battery longevity.

Smaller gel cell batteries work really well for setting up a low power (6 watts or less) transmitter on a street corner as a public demonstration of micropower radio. In Berkeley a 6 watt micropower station is set up at the local flea market as a community demonstration on weekends. It is called Flea Radio Berkeley. Transmitters can be set up at demonstrations and rallies so motorists can tune their radios to the frequency which is displayed on large banners near the streets and listen in on what is happening. This has worked very well. Use your imagination to show how micropower broadcasting can be brought into the community.

Filters

Although it is rather simple in design and construction a filter is one of the most important elements in broadcasting. No matter what, a proper filter must be used between the transmitter and antenna. Use of a filter will help deprive the FCC of one of its main arguments against micropower broadcasting - interference with other broadcast services.

A proper filter reduces or eliminates harmonics from your broadcast signal. Harmonics are produced by the transmitter and are multiples of the fundamental frequency you are tuned for. For example, if you broadcast at 104.1, you may produce a harmonic at 208.2, and (less likely) 312.6 and so on. Most filter designs are of the low pass type. They let frequencies below a certain frequency pass through unaffected. As the frequency increases and goes beyond that point the filter begins to attenuate any frequency that is higher than the set point. The degree of attenuation increases with the frequency. By the time the frequency of the first

harmonic is reached it will be severely attenuated. This is very important since the first harmonic from an FM transmitter falls in the high VHF TV band. Failure to reduce this harmonic will cause interference to neighboring TV sets.

You do not want to generate complaints from folks who engage in the odious habit of watching TV. Noble sentiments, such as telling them to smash their TV if they have a problem will not suffice. Use a filter.

Complaints increase the possibility of the FCC showing up at your door. One needs to be good broadcast neighbor and an asset to the community.

Harmonics further up the scale can cause interference to other mobile and emergency radio services. Not desirable either.

Transmitters with output power ratings of less than 25 watts will need at least a 7 pole design. Higher power units will need a 9 pole design. An increase in number of poles increase the degree of attenuation. Representative designs are shown. If you build one of these put it in a metal, well shielded enclosure.

Not really related to filters but an important side issue is the use of FM frequencies at the bottom and top ends of the band. Do not use 87.9 to 88.3 or so if there is a channel 6 TV frequency being used in your local area. Television sets have notoriously poor selectivity and your signal might end up coming in on the sound carrier of the TV if channel six is being used. At the top end of the band do not go any higher than 106 MHz if the transmitter is near an airport. In fact, do everything possible not be too close - at least several miles and away from the flight path(s). Even though interference possibilities are minimal there is not any point in taking chances since the FCC has claimed airplanes will fall from the sky if micropower broadcasting is given free reign. Corner cutting corporate airline maintenance polices most likely pose a greater danger to public safety than micropower broadcasting, however

Antennas

An antenna's primary purpose is to radiate the FM broadcast signal from the transmitter to surrounding FM radio receivers. In order to do this several conditions must be met. First, the antenna must be tuned to the frequency being transmitted. Secondly, it must be sited and oriented properly.

At FM frequencies the radio waves travel in a straight line until an obstacle is met. This is known as line of sight transmission. If the receiving antenna and transmitting antenna can "see" each other and the path distance is not too great to attenuate the signal, then the broadcast signal can be received. Radio signal strength is based on the inverse square law. Double the distance and the signal strength will be 1/4 of what it was.

Since FM broadcast transmissions are line of sight, the height of the antenna is very important. Increasing the height is more effective than doubling or tripling the power. Due to the curvature of the earth the higher the antenna the greater the distance to the horizon. Increased height will place the antenna above obstructions which otherwise would block the signal. Your antenna should be at least 40-50 feet above the ground. Count yourself lucky if you can site the antenna on a hill or a ten story building.

An antenna is rough tuned by adjusting the length of the radiating element(s). Many antenna designs are based on or derived from what is called a dipole, two radiating elements whose length is roughly equivalent to 1/4 of the wavelength of the desired frequency of transmission. Wavelength in inches is determined by dividing 11811 by the frequency in megahertz. The result is either divided by 4 or multiplied by .25 to yield the 1/4 wavelength.

A correction factor of .9 to .95, depending on the diameter of the element, is multiplied times the 1/4 wavelength resulting in the approximate length of each element.

Fine tuning the antenna requires the use of an SWR power meter. SWR is an abbreviation for standing wave ratio which is the ratio between power going into the antenna and the power being reflected back by the antenna. A properly tuned antenna is going to reflect very little power back. Correct use of an SWR meter is described a bit further down in this section. IF you can afford \$100. get a dual needle meter which shows both reflected and forward power at the same time. A good brand is Daiwa.

A dipole with tuning stubs is one of the easiest antennas to make and tune. Two dipoles can be combined on a 10 foot mast if they are spaced 3/4 of a wavelength from center to center with the elements vertical and fed with a phasing harness. A phasing harness consists of two 1.25 wavelength pieces of 75 ohm coaxial cable (RG11) cut to a length that is the product of the 1.25 wavelength times the velocity factor (supplied by the manufacturer) of the cable. A PL259 plug is attached to the end of each cable. These are connected to a 259 T adapter with the center socket being the connection for the feed cable coming from the transmitter. The other ends go respectively to each dipole. Such an arrangement will increase the power going into the antenna by a factor of 2.

Besides the dipole a number of other antenna designs are employed in micropower broadcasting. Each one has a characteristic pattern of coverage. Antennas can be broken down into two basic types – omnidirectional and directional. Under most circumstances the omni is the antenna of choice for micropower broadcasting. Polarization is another aspect to consider but does not play that big of a role in most cases. Antennas can be vertically, horizontally or circular in polarization. Most micro broadcast antennas are vertically polarized. In theory a vertically oriented receiving antenna will receive better if the transmitting antenna is vertically oriented as well. Obstructions in the receiving environment will have a tendency to bounce the signal around so that the signal will not be exactly vertically polarized when it hits the receiving antenna, particularly in a car that is moving. Commercial broadcasters employ circular polarization which yields both vertical and horizontal components to the signal. It is said that this is best for car radios. This may be true given the dependence of commercial broadcasters on "drive time" as a peak listening period.

A single radiating element vertically oriented will have a rather high angle of radiation where a good portion of the signal is going up to the sky at an angle of around 35 degrees or more. When you combine two vertical elements such as two dipoles you reduce the angle of radiation to a point where the signal is more concentrated in the horizontal plane. This is what accounts for the apparent doubling of radiated power when you use two dipoles phased together. Power output from the antenna or antenna array is known as effective radiated power (ERP) and is usually equal to or greater than the input power.

Several vertical element antenna designs have a lower angle of radiation even though they only use one element. These are the J-Pole and the Slim Jim designs. Having a signal pattern that is more compressed into the horizontal plane makes the Slim Jim ideal for urban environments. Both can be easily constructed from ½" copper pipe and fittings. Plans are available from FRB directly or the FRB web site.

Another class of antennas are the 1/4 and 5/8 wave ground plane antennas. A commercially manufactured 5/8 ground plane for FM broadcast purposes is available for around \$100. It is an ideal antenna for those who want an easy to tune and assemble antenna. Set up time is less than 15 minutes. Plans for these antennas are available from FRB.

Directional antennas are not usually required for micropower broadcasting. If the area you wish to cover lies in one particular direction you might consider the use of such an antenna.

An easy way to do this is to put a reflecting screen 1/4 of a wavelength behind a vertical dipole. The screen will need to be bit taller than the total length of the elements and about 2-3 feet wide. This will yield a nice directional pattern with a fair amount of power gain. Your pattern will be about 60-70 degrees wide. Another type of directional antenna is the yagi which has a basic dipole as the radiating element but additional elements as reflectors and directors. A yagi can be a bit difficult to build for those not well versed in antenna design and construction. Your best choice is a dipole with a reflector.

For those who wish for a practical design that can be built and put to use the following is a basic dipole antenna which can be constructed from common hardware store items. It uses 1/2 inch copper water pipe and fittings along with aluminum tubing. A half inch plastic threaded T is used with a copper 1/2 inch threaded to 1/2 inch slip adapters at all three points. An aluminum tube 9/16 of inch or so in diameter will fit into this slip adapter and is attached with two #6 self tapping sheet metal screws. This tubing is 20 inches long. Another piece of aluminum tubing 15 inches long with a diameter small enough to slip inside the other tubing is used as the adjustable tuning element. Four slots 90 degrees apart and 1 1/2 inches long are cut into in one end of the larger tubing. A small diameter hose clamp is slipped over that end. With the smaller tubing inserted inside the hose clamp is tightened to hold it in place. This is repeated for the second element. A copper half inch thread to slip adapter is soldered to one end of a 36 inch piece of 1/2 copper tubing which is the support arm for the dipole. A copper T is soldered to the other end. Then, two 3 inch pieces of 1/2 inch copper tubing are soldered to the T fitting. This allows easy clamping to a mast. A solder lug is attached to each element using one of the self tapping screws holding the elements to the slip fittings. Your coaxial cable will be attached to these solder lugs. Center conductor to one, braid or shield to the other. You can get a little fancier and make an aluminum bracket to hold an SO239 socket and attach this to the T connector.

Once you have it all put together as shown in the diagram it is time to tune it. Adjust the element lengths to the 1/4 wave length you arrived at with the above formula. Tighten the clamps so the tuning stubs can barely slide back and forth. Mark each stub where it enters the larger tubing. Using either hose clamps or U clamps attach the antenna to the end of a mast piece 10 feet long. The element to which the braid or shield of the coax is attached must be pointing down. Support the mast so that it stands straight up with the antenna at the top. It is best to do this outside.

Set up your transmitter and connect an SWR/Power meter between the transmitter and the antenna. Adjust your meter to read SWR according to the directions that came with it. SWR is the ratio of power coming from the transmitter and the power reflected back from the antenna. A properly tuned antenna will reflect very little power back, resulting in a very low SWR ratio. Too much reflected power can damage the transmitter.

Turn on the transmitter and observe the SWR or amount of reflected power. Shut the transmitter off if the level is very high and check your connections. Rough tuning the antenna by measurements should have brought the readings down to a fairly low level. Turn off the transmitter and adjust each tubing stub up or down about 1/4 of an inch. Turn the transmitter back on and note the readings. If the reflected power and SWR ratio went lower you went the right direction in either increasing or decreasing the length of the stubs. Turn off the transmitter and continue another 1/4 inch in the same direction or the opposite direction if the SWR ratio and reflected power increased. Turn the transmitter on again. If the reading is lower continue to go in the same direction in 1/4 inch increments being sure to turn off the transmitter to make the adjustments. Continue to do this cycle until you have reached the lowest possible reading. At some point the readings will start to increase again. Stop there.

You can do this with two dipoles as mentioned earlier in this section. Each dipole is tuned by itself and then both are connected with a phasing harness when mounted to the mast section.

Connectors and cable

Radio frequency cables are referred to as coax as a generic term. It is short for coaxial. A coaxial cable consists of an inner conductor inside an insulating core .This is surrounded on the outside by a metal braid or foil, called the shield .This shield is in turn covered by an insulating jacket of plastic material. Coaxial cables are specified in terms of impedance which for most micropower broadcasting purposes is 50 ohms except for dipole phasing harnesses.

In the 50 ohm category there are a number of choices when selecting coaxial cable. The most important characteristic of coax is it's level of signal attenuation. This depends on the length of the cable and its particular frequency response. RG58 coaxial cable has a high degree of attenuation and should only be used for short connections. RG8X or mini 8 works well for lengths under 50 feet and is suited for portable and mobile set ups since it is rather flexible. RG8 and its higher performance cousins such as 213 and Belden 9913 are the best for fixed installations. Belden 9913 has the lowest loss for any given length as compared to other variations of RG8. In fact, it has a loss figure at 100 MHz that compares well with commercial broadcast hard-line coax. It is rather stiff cable and must be installed correctly.

Coaxial cables do not take rough treatment very well, especially 9913. They must be carefully rolled up by hand, not wrapped between palm of hand and elbow like a rope. Kinks are to be avoided at all costs. When routing a cable keep the bends from being sharp and keep it away from circumstances where it can be pinched or slammed.

Three types of connectors are in general use - BNC, PL259 and N. Most micropower broadcasting equipment uses PL259 and its mating socket known as the SO239. Any connector will introduce some small degree of signal loss. N connectors are used where high performance and reliability are of most importance.

Studio setup

A typical broadcast studio consists of an audio mixer (DJ style works best), one or more CD players, one or more cassette tape decks, a turntable or two, several microphones, and a compressor/limiter. Optional items can include a cart machine and a phone patch.

Reasonable quality mixers start at \$200 and go up in price from there. DJ styles are best since they have a large number of inputs available and support turntables without the need of external phono preamps. Any mixer you select should have least 2 or more microphone input channels. These should be low impedance inputs. Other features to look for include high visibility VU (level) meters, slide faders for each channel, switchable inputs for each channel, stereo or mono selection for the output signal, and an auxiliary output for an air check tape deck.

CD players and tape decks can be your average higher quality consumer audio gear. Day in and day out usage will eventually take their toll so pay for the extra warranty period when it is offered. When one wears out in 6 months or so just take it back under warranty for either repair or replacement.

DJ style turntables are the best choice for playing vinyl. Cheaper units just will not stand up to the wear and tear of daily usage. Select a heavy duty stylus as well.

Microphones should be fairy good quality vocal types. They can be either directional or omnidirectional. Directional microphones will pick up less ambient noise but need to be on axis with the person's mouth for best pick up. Since some folks do not pay attention to where the microphone is in relation to their mouth, an omnidirectional might be considered a better choice if this is the case. A distance of about 4 inches should be maintained between the

microphone and mouth. Place a wind screen foam piece over each microphone. Some microphones have built-in shock and vibration isolation to keep bumps to the microphone from being audible. It is a good idea to use some sort of isolated holder for the DJ microphone. An old swing arm lamp can be adapted to hold a microphone.

For programmers who do a lot of reading on material on the air a headphone microphone is something to consider since it will maintain a uniform distance from mouth to microphone no matter where the head moves to. One drawback is that they tend to be a bit fragile in rough hands.

Headphones are essential for monitoring and curing up program material. You can either opt for high quality rugged units that are a bit costly or plan on replacing an inexpensive set every few months.

A limiter/compressor is an essential part of the audio chain. It is used to keep the audio signal from exceeding a preset level. Without this the transmitter will be overmodulated resulting in signal splatter and distortion. Signal splatter will cause interference with adjacent stations and distortion will send your listeners elsewhere.

Common to most limiter/compressors are a set of controls - input level, output level, ratio, threshold, attack and decay. To properly set up the mixer, limiter/compressor and transmitter you start with a steady audio source (a signal generator plugged into the board or a test tone CD, tape or record). You adjust the input level and master output level controls so that the meters are reading zero dB. Master level should be at mid position. Audio output goes from the mixer to the limiter/compressor and from there to the transmitter. Do not turn the transmitter on at this time.

Most limiter/compressors have indicator lights or meters to show how much gain reduction is being applied and the output level. Set the ratio control to the infinity setting, this enables hard limit function. Attack and decay can be set around mid position. Adjust the threshold and the input level until the gain reduction shows activity. Adjust the output level so that the indicator lights or meters show a 0 dB output level.

Turn the level input on the transmitter all the way down and power up the transmitter. Monitor the signal on good quality radio. Slowly turn the level control until you can hear the test tone. Compare the signal level to that of other stations. Your level should be slightly less since most other operations are using quite a bit of audio processing on their signal. You may have to make fine adjustments to the limiter/compressor to get things exactly right.

When everything is set up correctly any audio signals that exceed 0 dB on the board will be kept at that level by the compressor/limiter. You will need to listen carefully to the signal to make sure when a "hot" audio source exceeds this that the transmitted signal keeps an even level and does not distort or splatter. There will be some interplay between the output level and the threshold setting. Nor do you want a signal that is too low in level either since that will produce a weak sounding broadcast.

A very important consideration is to keep as much distance between the studio gear and the transmitter as possible. RF (radio frequency signals) will find their way into audio equipment and produce a hum or other types of noise. You can separate the two areas by using a low impedance cable between the limiter/compressor and the transmitter. This can be a long microphone cable with XLR connectors or a made up shielded 2 conductor cable with XLR connectors. You can have about 150 feet of cable maximum. A high impedance to low impedance transformer will be needed at one end or both depending on whether the limiter/compressor and transmitter have low or high impedance connections. These transformers usually have an XLR female connector on the low impedance side and a 1/4"

phone plug on the high impedance side. If your transmitter has an RCA style input you will need the proper adapter to go from 1/4" phone plug to the RCA plug.

Your studio should be arranged to provide easy access to all controls and equipment with plenty of table space. An L or horseshoe shape works well for the studio bench. An open area within the sight line of the operator should be provided so there will be a place for extra microphones and guests.

Final word

Although it seems like there is a lot to deal with in setting up a micropower station, it can be broken down into three areas- studio, transmitter and antenna. It should not be difficult to find someone with studio set-up experience to help with the project. Transmitters, particularly their construction and tuning, should be left to an experienced person. If such a person is not available there are a number of people who will assemble, test and tune your transmitter for whatever fee they have set. Stick to a commercial, easy to tune antenna such as the Comet if your skills are minimal. These can be purchased pre-tuned for an additional fee from FRB and L. D. Brewer. It best to put most of the energy into organizing and setting up the station.

Experience has shown that once the technical operation is in place and running, it will require very little in the way of intervention except for routine maintenance (cleaning tape heads, dusting, etc.) and occasional replacement of a tape or CD player.

What requires most attention and "maintenance" is the human element, however. More time will be spent on this than any equipment. As a survival strategy it is best to involve as much of the community as possible in the radio station. The more diverse and greater number of voices the better. It is much easier for the FCC to shut down a "one man band" operation than something serving an entire community. Our focus is on empowering communities with their own collective voice, not creating vanity stations. Why imitate commercial radio?

Before you commit to your first broadcast it would be advisable to have an attorney available who is sympathetic to the cause. Even though they may not be familiar with this aspect of the law there is a [legal web site](#) which offers all of the material used in the Free Radio Berkeley case. There are enough briefs and other materials available to bring an attorney up to speed [The FRB case is an American specific case and the law is not the same in the UK - Libcom].

*by Stephen Dunifer
Edited by libcom*

Setting up a newsletter - technical guide



A guide covering technical, design and layout issues with producing your own newsletters and publications.

A. Getting started

- 1) Order some of the materials mentioned at the end of this article so that you will have them in time for your first meeting.

- 2) If you haven't already lined up a group of people interested in producing the first issue, make a friendly poster to recruit others. The poster should describe the purpose of your newspaper, solicit articles for the first issue, and invite people to call a telephone number to ask about joining your collective. Put up at least 100 copies of your poster on campus where they will stay up for three weeks or more.
- 3) Ask other publications about potential local printers. Once you have their numbers, call to inquire about prices, delivery rates, turnaround time, page sizes, whether they offer recycled paper, whether they are a union printer, etc. Make up an advertising rate sheet (sample available from the Thistle, see below) and arrange to meet with the proprietors of the four or five local businesses or campus offices which would be most likely to advertise. Once you have obtained about a page (\$200-\$400) worth of commitments, call the people who responded together for a first meeting.
- 4) You may wish to have two initial meetings: one just to get acquainted (and hand out copies of this article), and a more formal meeting to resolve the following eight key issues:

- i) Size of paper and masthead design
- ii) Mission statement and guidelines for what you will print
- iii) Procedures and requirements for article submissions, editing, and layout
- iv) Deadlines for first issue article submissions
- v) Compiling list of potential advertisers and assigning people to solicit ads
- vi) Locating computer equipment
- vii) Dates of first editorial meeting, editing session(s), and layout
- viii) Applying for university recognition and funding

B. The Editorial process

- 1) On a blackboard, list the names and authors of the articles expected for the issue, with four check-off columns for In, Edited, Proofed, and Length. Set aside three manila folders labeled Unedited, Edited, and Proofed.
- 2) Articles should be submitted both on paper and on disk if possible. When an article arrives, check it off as "in"; put the paper version in the Unedited folder. If you only receive a disk, print out a paper copy; otherwise you may not realize that the article is "in". Write the length of the article on the blackboard. You may wish to measure length by "K", where 1K is 1,000 characters. (Using Microsoft Word, the number of characters is displayed each time you save your work.)
- 3) When most of the articles are in, several copies should be made for a team of editors to read. This team could be everyone, or it could be just two people. To promote democratic decision-making, you should try a rotating group composed of one-third to one-half of the people involved in the publication.
- 4) At the editorial meeting, people should discuss the articles on the blackboard one by one. For each article, you can decide (usually by consensus) to "Yes, run it, possibly after some editing," or "No, don't ever run it," or "Maybe, run only if there's extra space." If something is low priority and needs work, it generally should be postponed to the next issue so that it can be rewritten by the author. Finally, at the end of the list of articles, the editorial meeting should decide which articles are page 1 material, and which deserve the next most prominent locations: page 3, the back page, page 2, the centerfold, page 5, etc.
- 5) Expect the editing meeting to last at least two hours (i.e. bring food!).

C. The typing and editing process

- 1) Depending on the size of your group and whether you have access to a lab or office with many computers, you may want to have people type in and edit articles separately or work

together in a common space. Generally, the latter option results in a more uniform product and is very important to training new members of your newspaper. (If there are more experienced journalists in your group who can write copy that doesn't need much editing, you can set up a special process to let them cover events which occur after your editing meeting.)

2) Before entering the articles into the computer, create three computer folders parallel to the manila folders: Unedited, Edited, and Proofed. Copy all the articles submitted on disk to the Unedited folder (it may be necessary to first convert them to the proper word-processing program format). Finally, arrange for volunteers to type in the rest of the articles.

3) Once the articles have been placed into the Unedited folder, you are ready to edit. Some common formatting guidelines for newspaper text are listed in a box below. When done editing, spell-check your articles as a final step, and save them in a readable font, with a uniform point size, such as Times 12 or Courier 12.

4) Finally print out the file and save it in the Edited computer folder. Put the printed copy in the Edited manila folder, and check off the article as Edited on the blackboard.

D. The proofing process

1) The printed copy allows you to make use of volunteers who are unfamiliar with computers in the proofing process. It also makes it much easier to detect small problems like extra spaces. The person proofing the articles should fix typos only. She or he should not edit (reword) the article unless there is something seriously and obviously wrong with it. The idea is to prevent an endless series of edits. (Editing often introduces new errors into an article.) If the editing process is inadequate then more attention should be given to training and supervising editors to fix the problems before they reach the proofing stage.

2) Once you type in the proofing changes, save the file in the Proofed folder, and check off the article as Proofed on the blackboard. The printed copy can be moved to the Proofed manila folder; it is not necessary to reprint the file unless you have made changes other than those indicated on paper.

E. The Layout process

1) Using a page layout program like Quark XPRESS or Pagemaker, set up a "tabloid" newspaper template. It is good to place your ads before importing the articles. To indicate the location of each ad, make a box representing it at the bottom of a page where it will not interfere with headlines. Type the name of the person or group that purchased the ad in large text within the box to identify it.

2) Import all the articles from the Proofed folder into this template. You should first import them "roughly" so that they use about 50-70% of each page not including the ads. Then give each article a standard 30-point bold headline (this can be adjusted later), and set the byline off from the text (by centering, for example). You can then print "thumbnails" of your pages to give you an idea of the amount of space available to be filled by graphics.

3) Finally, measure some graphics or photos to go along with each article. Then create "graphics boxes" using your layout program and move them to a visually pleasing location (where they usually will displace your text).

4) Adjust the sizes of the boxes, and add "pull quotes", clip art, white space near headlines, etc., so that the text of each article ends precisely at the end of a page or continues onto a page that has exactly enough space left for the continuation. Mark each continuation clearly.

5) Print out your newspaper at 65% reduction (portrait orientation) for final review before printing it at actual size.

F. Paste-up

- 1) Each page must be pasted together onto a printer board from two half-pages, 8 1/5" x 11". It is easiest to paste the halves together if one of the halves is cut so that it overlaps the other half by one or two lines of text.
- 2) On each page, paste down line-art graphics. For photos and graphics which include shades of grey or extremely fine resolution, write a percentage and page number on the back of the graphic and put it in an envelope. This will tell the printer to "shoot in" and half-tone the graphic on the specified page at the specified reduction or enlargement percentage.

G. Printing and distribution

Give the printer a realistic date for publication and make sure there will be people to distribute your paper after it returns from the printer. Your newspaper won't mean anything if it stays piled in your office.

H. References

Fortunately, several books help explain the terminology of printing, mechanics of desktop publishing, methods for getting ads and handling finances, performing research, and using English in standard ways.

We recommend six publications to help campus journalists get started.

- 1) How To Do Leaflets, Posters, And Newsletters, by Penny Brigham et al. Available from PEP Publishers, 3519 Yorkshire, Detroit, MI 48224. \$14.95; bulk discounts available.
- 2) The Guide To The Thistle (Alternative News Collective, MIT). For \$5, they will send you this guide with a sample advertising brochure and 2 sample layouts in Quark XPRESS and Pagemaker on a Mac disk. Write to Thistle, Room W20-413, 84 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139. Tel #(617) 253-0399.
- 3) The Reporters' Handbook (guide to investigative journalism), published by Investigative Reporters & Editors, University of Missouri, 100 Neff Hall, Columbia, MO 65211. Tel #(314) 882-2042.
- 5) A collection of \$2 brochures on research, interviewing, legal issues, and Freedom of Information Act techniques from the Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press, 1735 Eye St. NW, Suite 504, Washington, DC 20006. Tel #(202) 466-6313.

I. Submissions

It helps to run a box like the following in every issue:

Guidelines for submission

If you use a computer, please submit your article on a 3 1/2" diskette for a Mac or a PC compatible. We use MS-Word, but we can read most any format. Otherwise, send on paper or E-mail to . Please include one or two photos or charts as it will help us give your article a more pleasing layout. You should limit your submissions to the following length unless you have worked out a longer piece with the editors:

Letters: 400 words

Features and Investigative Articles: 1500 words

Opinion Pieces: 800 words

Appendix: Helpful editing and formatting procedures

- 1) Text should be justified, with 1/4 inch tabs for paragraph indentation. No blank lines between paragraphs.
- 2) Use two spaces after a period or a colon and one after a semicolon.

- 3) Indicate author in centered text above the beginning of the article, followed by a blank line.
- 4) Place biographies/credits of authors italicized in [brackets] at the end of each article, followed by the source. [This article is excerpted from Federation of American Scientists' Government Secrecy Bulletin, May 1990].
- 5) Titles of publications italicized (or de-italicized, if they appear in the credit).
- 6) If bullets (o) are used they should be properly typed in (Option-8 on a Mac, Control-V 4,3 in Word Perfect) and they should be followed by a tab. Paragraphs marked by bullets should be indented except for the first line, which should be flush left.
- 7) Accent marks should be properly typed in (on a Mac, Option-n n yields the n and Option-e yields accented vowels).
- 8) Spaces go before and after long dashes - like this (Option-Shift-dash on a Mac).
- 9) Write out acronyms the first time they are used. Use a person's last name the second time you refer to them. Adopt some standards for spelling, such as US for United States, 90's or 1990s for 1990's, right-wing (adjective) as opposed to Right Wing (noun).
- 10) Don't forget to mention when and where something happened and who was involved
by Rich Cowan (co-founder of The Thistle at MIT)
Edited by libcom

Guide to dealing with the corporate media



A guide to using the mainstream corporate or state media to get your message across.

Guide to dealing with the press



An article with advice on all aspects of dealing with the mainstream press, including face-to-face, press releases, interviews, making complaints and more.

Contains some UK-specific details.

Part 1: What we're up against

A. Triviality

Every media outlet shares the same principal aim: to expand its share of the market. It does this by seeking to grab and hold onto people's attention. This is why the media concentrates so much on events rather than issues, and especially trivial, flashy and colourful events. Most journalists are convinced that people can't concentrate for more than a few seconds. This is mainly because they can't concentrate for more than a few seconds.

On the face of it, this is a major disadvantage for us, as our aim is to make people aware of big and important issues.

B. Bias

Many outlets have a secondary aim: of pandering to the prejudices of their proprietors. As

most large news-gathering organisations are run by perverse billionaires whose interests are at odds with those of the rest of society, this makes life still harder for us.

In practice, it means that there are some outlets we simply have to avoid: there's no point in approaching the Sun, for example, unless you're appealing to narrow nationalism or are prepared to get your tits out. Stay well away from the Daily Mail, unless you're highlighting an animal rights issue which doesn't involve a confrontation with big business/landowners/hunters etc.

But there are often a surprising number of opportunities for making use of other parts of the right-wing media: some of the things that occasionally slip past the editors' noses at the Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph, for example, are pretty unexpected. While their editors and proprietors may be total bastards, a lot of journalists are not bad people, just weak and cowardly. Many of them want to help, and will look for opportunities to do so without upsetting their bosses.

Newspapers are allowed to be partisan, and expected to be by their readers. But the broadcast media are legally obliged to be balanced and fair. In practice, as we know, this isn't always the case, and there are certain programmes, such as Littlejohn, which you should avoid at all costs. More importantly, their concept of fairness is a narrow one: as long as both Labour and Tory politicians have had their say, balance is seen to have been achieved, even if the view from Westminster represents just a tiny part of the political spectrum.

Most broadcast outlets are also very conscious of the views of their advertisers, and even more trashy than the printed ones. The result is, once again, conservatism: broadcast journalists appear to be terrified of telling their audience something it doesn't know already.

C. The Game

Another way in which we're up against it is that we take our campaigns seriously, while interviewers tend to see their work as a game, whose political outcome is immaterial, but which must be played by a set of rules. These rules are, at first sight, obscure to people without a lot of media experience. If you don't play by the rules, it's a foul and you're sent off. As our only objective is to win, regardless of etiquette, we tend to foul more often than other contributors. As a result, sometimes we come across very badly.

That's the bad news, but there's also plenty of good news: we have several significant advantages over our opponents.

Part 2: Our advantages

A. Integrity

We're genuine people, not hired hands defending a corporate or institutional position. This shows when we allow it to: an open and straightforward appeal to commonsense can cut through the clamour of self-interest and spin-doctoring with a powerful resonance. When we keep our message uncluttered and get straight to the point, we can be devastatingly effective.

B. Articulating Public Sentiment

People are increasingly prepared to listen to what we have to say: many know in their heart of hearts that things are going badly wrong, and could be very much better. Activists in the media have often been able to reach parts of the public psyche that no one else can touch, as they articulate sentiments that have never been put into words before. Hard as it may be to believe, a lot of mainstream journalists are secretly sympathetic to the causes we espouse.

C. Inherent media friendliness

We're colourful, fun, outlandish and outrageous. Much as television executives might claim to hate us, television cameras love us.

Part 3: How to get the press to come to your action

News doesn't just happen; it is made to happen. News, in other words, is managed and manipulated. And if we don't manage it, someone else will.

A. Coordination

Media work tends to be tacked onto actions as an afterthought, with the result that there's almost always too little of it and too late. Invariably, far too much is left to chance, which means that actions often end up alienating more people than they reach or, even worse, get completely ignored. If we built our tree houses with as little forethought and care as we conduct our press work, there would have been some pretty gruesome accidents by now.

Reaching the media is as time-consuming, as demanding and as necessary as building lock-ons or digging tunnels. If we don't start tackling this task with the efficiency and creativity that we bring to the rest of our work, we'll be worsted again and again by our opponents.

This means that every action aimed at altering public opinion must have a dedicated media coordinator, whose job is to ensure that the activists' point of view reaches the wider world. She or he must be responsible for planning a press strategy, drawing up a hit-list of journalists, preparing press releases and briefing spokespeople. Ideally the coordinator will build up a small team, including someone who stays behind to write and despatch up-to-the-minute press releases and people who will meet and escort the journalists who come to an action.

Not everyone is going to be good at handling the press. To do the job well, you need to be confident, sociable and pretty mouthy. At least one person on the team should be able to write well. But media skills, like any others, can be learnt, and surprisingly quickly.

B. Timing

Is critical. You have to give journalists enough notice of your action or initiative, but not so much that they forget about it. A good time to put out a first, advance press release, for example, is about ten days beforehand, with a second one sent out two days beforehand. Journalists don't only have a three-second attention span, they also have a three-second memory, so you've got to keep on their case.

The day of the week is also important. A great day for an action, from the point of view of publicity, is Sunday, as not a lot happens on Sundays, and journalists need something to put in Monday's papers and in Sunday afternoon's news programmes. If you can do it before lunch, so much the better. The later in the day something happens, the less likely the newspapers are to cover it, as they can't get it to press on time.

If you really want your action to be ignored by the press, then do it on Budget Day. In other words, look out for what else is happening that day. If there's a huge story pending, you don't want to be competing with it. Nor do you want to be competing with another alternative event: they won't cover two protests on the same day.

C. Pre-publicity

Most journalists are also astoundly unimaginative and cowardly: they don't want to touch an issue unless it's already been mentioned in the press. If you can pull it off (and it's not always possible), it's very useful to get a friendly and trustworthy journalist to flag the action up a week or two beforehand, without giving too much away.

The best way to achieve this is:

- 1) Find your journalist
- 2) Invite her/him to your meetings, under what are called "Chatham House" rules. This means that they can't make use of anything they hear there without your permission.

3) Create an atmosphere of secrecy, excitement and intrigue, which only that journalist (or, as a maximum, two or three journalists) is privy to. All journalists love to imagine they're in the Famous Five.

4) Be very nice to them and make them think they're part of the gang.

5) Once it's been mentioned in the press, you'll find that there's a lot more interest from other reporters. Pathetic really, but there you have it.

D. Press releases

Journalists speak only one language, and that's their own. If you're going to reach them you have to speak that language too. This means that your press release should mimic the format and style of a news story. It's a simple and straightforward formula and (sorry to be dictatorial) it MUST be applied. If it isn't, your press release won't work. Period.

Here's how to do it:

(from top of page)

- i. Your contact details
 - ii. Embargo
 - iii. HEADLINE (NO MORE THAN EIGHT WORDS)
 - iv. First paragraph: one sentence which tells the whole story.
 - v. Two or three short paragraphs explaining the story.
 - vi. Contact details (again)
- (bottom of page)

(new page)

- vii. Notes for journalists

Here's how to fill it in, section by section:

i. Your contact details. No journalist will run a story without them.

Essentials are:

The name of your organisation/disorganisation (preferably big, bold and across the top of the page)

One or more contact names

Contact number(s): where contacts are DEFINITELY going to be for at least the next two days (mobile phone numbers are useful).

ii. An embargo means that you are instructing journalists not to publish or broadcast the information in the press release before a certain time. There are several good reasons for an embargo:

Journalists will know they aren't going to be trumped by anyone else getting in before them. It creates a sense of event.

Timelines concentrate journalists' minds.

You know when to expect publicity, so you can plan subsequent news management around it.

NB: An embargo doesn't mean that journalists won't be stupid enough to phone the police or the company due to be occupied and ask what they think. So don't stick anything on your press release which you don't want to be generally known.

This is the usual format:

EMBARGO: 00.01am, Friday 15th May

00.01am is a good time, as the papers can then keep up with the broadcasters, and it's less confusing than 00.00.

DON'T put on an embargo if you've got some immediate news, that you want on the radio or TV straight away. Generally, you'd embargo a press release giving advance warning of an action (till about 24 hours before the action's due to start), but not a press release which comes out once the action's started.

iii. The headline must be short, pithy and to the point. Avoid mystery, elaborate puns or being too clever. The purpose of the headline is to grab the journalists' attention and give them an idea of what the press release is about. If it doesn't do both of these things, they'll read no further and dump it in the bin. It must be NO MORE than eight words long. Use a big, bold font.

Writing headlines isn't easy, and generally takes a good deal of practice. So practise. Look at how they do it in the papers, then try writing headlines for imaginary actions, or real ones which aren't going to happen for a while. Remember: in this as in all writing, a straightforward, plain style is best.

iv. The first paragraph. This isn't easy either but, like the headline, it's essential to get it right. You've got ONE sentence in which to tell the whole story. If the journalist doesn't get the jist of it, she or he won't read on.

There is nothing so complicated that its essential point can't be summarised in a simple sentence. So work out what you're trying to say, then boil it down to its essence. As before, look at the news stories in the papers and see how they do it.

v. The rest of the text. Must be no more than two or three paragraphs long, each of which should be no longer than one or two straightforward sentences. They should expand on what you say in the first paragraph. Keep it simple and avoid jargon. Assume (and you won't be far wrong) that journalists know nothing. If there is other essential information which you can't fit in, put it in the Notes for Journalists section. (see below).

Above all, make sure that the first and second paragraphs have covered all the five Ws: WHO, WHY, WHAT, WHERE and WHEN.

vi. Your contact details again. Remember: most journalists have a three second memory, are wilfully blind and very, very stupid, so you have to keep on their case.

vii. Notes to journalists. This is optional. Preferably they should be on a separate page. Journalists have got very little time, and the sight of a huge block of text which is hard to digest will put them off. They want to look at the first page and know that the essentials of the story are there. If they want more, they can turn over and read on.

Generally, you'd write no more than four or five paragraphs of notes (and certainly no more than a page). They should give more details about the rationale for the action: eg facts and figures about genetically engineered soya, DBFO roads etc. In other words, this is the place for the complex information which might put journalists off if it's on the front page.

Number the paragraphs in this section, as it makes them look easier to digest.

E. What makes a press release effective

News, of course, is meant to be all about novelty, so emphasise what's new about your action. This shouldn't be difficult as the DIY movement is so creative and innovative: people are always coming up with exciting new approaches, so all you have to do is make sure the press hears about them.

Take the Birmingham Northern Relief Road protest, for example. A headline like "Protesters occupy trees along route of new road" will consign a press release straight to the bin, as most journalists will imagine they've heard it all before. But "World's longest sermon threatens to stop new road" (telling the story of the vicar who has discovered that it's illegal to interrupt a priest during his sermon, and intends to preach continually in front of the threatened trees) will make them sit up and wonder what it's all about. If you want to mention the tree-sit, you can do so further on in the text.

There might also be a new political aspect of the story you can use to attract the journalists' attention to your protest: "New road could destroy region's economy, experts say" would, for most journalists, be counter-intuitive and interesting (which shows how much they've been paying attention).

If your action's outside London, and you're organizing transport to get there, say so in the press release, pointing out that journalists are welcome to join you on the coach. Many reporters are so lazy that they won't bother turning up unless everything's laid on for them.

F. When to send press releases

The most critical press release is the one that goes out about two days before the event. Without it, you won't get much coverage, if any at all. But it's a good idea to put one out much earlier than that as well - about ten days prior to the event - so that when the journalists get the second one they should be ready to respond to it.

It's also important to send out a third one the moment the action begins, telling them you've succeeded in stopping work on the bypass/locking Group 4 in their offices etc.

If it's a one day action and your press person has still got the energy and resources, it's no bad thing to send out a fourth press release saying how it all went. A journalist's interest is pretty unpredictable, and could be stimulated at any time.

If the action lasts longer than one day, send out a new press release every day, as long as you've got something to say. Once the event's in the press already, there'll be plenty of opportunities for follow-ups. This is the time when you can sometimes get them to cover the issue you're trying to highlight, rather than simply the event.

G. Who to send them to

The secret of all successful press releasing is getting them to the right people - so find out who the right people are. Make a list of:

Media outlets you want to reach

Individual journalists who seem to be interested in/sympathetic to the cause

The more you can reach the better, of course, but, unless you're just aiming at the local press, realistically you want to try to press release at least forty places.

If it's a national action and you want national publicity, they must include the following:

All the broadsheet newspapers

BBC newsroom

ITN/Channel 4 newsroom

Newsnight

The Today programme (on Radio 4), plus PM, The World at One, The World Tonight
Radio 5 Live

NB: You should adapt the tone and contents of your press release to the media you're trying to reach. "Road protesters come to Romford" might be of interest to the Newham Recorder, but to get to the nationals you'd need something more like "New front opens in road war".

H. How to send press releases

Faxing is still the best way to send them, and a fax modem is invaluable. Some journalists are beginning to emerge from the Neolithic, so they might be contactable by email, but on the whole the communications industry is the last place to use up-to-date communications (except the Department of Trade and Industry, which runs the government's Technology Foresight programme, yet can't use email). Don't use snail mail: it invariably gets lost/disregarded/placed on the bottom of the pile.

To get fax numbers, simply phone the papers, TV and radio stations in question and ask for the fax number of the Newsdesk. If you also want to send your press releases to named journalists at the same organisation, it's best to get their fax numbers off them: reception will often give you the wrong fax number, or one that's been out of date for months. Keep all the fax numbers you get for future reference. Best of all, load them permanently into your computer, so, once you've decided who should get what, your fax modem can contact them automatically.

I. Following up

One thing of which you can be absolutely certain is that something will get lost in the newsrooms you're targetting: either your press release, the journalist's concentration or the essence of the story. This means you MUST follow it up with a phone call.

Just a quick one will do. Ask:

Did you get it?

Will you be covering the action?

Do you need any more information?

They're likely to be rude, gruff and unhelpful. But don't be put off - they're paid to be like that. Make sure you're ready, if need be, to summarise the story in one or two sentences; the first question the journalist will ask is "wot's it all about then?", and her/his attention will wander if you spend more than ten seconds telling them.

However rude they are, never fail to be polite and charming: at the very least, you'll put them to shame.

Part 4: How to deal with journalists who come to your action

The whole media-exploitation process is about news management, and this is just as much the case once journalists get to the action as it is when you're trying to attract them. You've got to give the best possible account of what you're doing, and provide the clearest possible explanation of why you're doing it. This means:

A. Make sure the right people talk to the journalists.

Different people do different things best. Some are brilliant at designing leaflets or debating, but not much good at being charming to the "running dogs of the counter-revolution" and some people will have just dropped a tab of acid. This won't endear them to journalists.

Talking to the press is something of an art form: you must be charming, persuasive and well-briefed. Best of all, you'll have practised, by persuading your friends to pretend to be hostile reporters.

B. Be careful, but don't come across as suspicious.

Some of them will be there to help you, others will be there to get you. Sometimes the ones out to get you will pretend to be out to help you. The only real safeguards are: to know who they all are. Ask them who they are and who they work for. Some journalists are notorious for dissing the movement (eg John Harlow, James Bartholemew, Sebastian Sebag Montefiore). You should find out who the dodgy ones are before the action, so you'll know to be ultra-careful if they turn up.

not to say anything stupid or risky
be friendly towards them, whoever they are. Bite your lip. Don't put their backs up even if you hate the bastards.

C. Be a tour guide

Take them round the site, show them what you want them to see, and steer them away from what you don't want them to see. Introduce them to the people who'll get on well with them, and keep them away from the people who won't be able to restrain their contempt. If it doesn't seem like a major intrusion on their privacy, stay with them, in a friendly way, and talk them through everything they see.

D. Be ready to deal with the ones who don't turn up

However good your publicity, lots of journalists won't be able to make it, but might still be interested. They'll want to know what's happening and how things are going, so there should be at least one person on site with a working and charged-up mobile phone whose number has been posted on the press release. Journalists are suckers for on-the-spot reports, so when they ring, put some excitement into your voice. Give them plenty of colour, make them feel they can see it.

Part 5: Being interviewed

Interviews and studio discussions are a bloodsport, and you, the interviewee, are the one of the combatants. People watch or listen to them in the earnest hope that one or other of the participants will be gored to death. Like any other fight, you win not through brute force but through skill. And, like any other sport, there are rules you have to follow.

So here are the rules and tactics. Try them out on your friends. Practice, as in any other sport, is absolutely critical. If you haven't done many interviews before, get someone to pretend to be the interviewer a day or two before you're due to go on, and get her or him to give you a hard time. See how you do, and find out which parts of your technique you'll have to brush up.

If you don't practise, expect to be caught out every time. If you do practise, you'll find that all you have to do is repeat what you've been through already, which isn't a scary prospect at all.

Rules and tactics

Be informed. This is the golden rule. Remember, this is an information war, and the best warriors are the ones with the best information. Don't go into a studio unless you're confident that you know your subject better than the person you're up against, and can head her or him off if they try to outfox you with some new facts. This means lots of reading. Make sure your information is reliable and stands up to critical examination.

Be calm. However much the issue, or your opponent, winds you up, you mustn't let it show. Generally the calmest person is the one whom the audience sees as the winner. This doesn't mean you can't be passionate and enthusiastic - indeed these are good things - but your passion and enthusiasm must be tightly controlled and mustn't, repeat mustn't, spill over into anger. If necessary, take a deep breath before answering the question. Be polite but firm with everyone.

Be concise. It's amazing how little time you get. You must know exactly what you want to say, and say it in as few words as possible, with clarity and determination. The main point must come at the beginning of the interview: you should summarise the whole issue in just one or two sentences before expanding on your theme.

It's the answers that count, not the questions. When you go into the studio, you must know exactly what you want to say and how you want to say it. Don't be too scrupulous about answering the question: deal with it as briefly as possible, then get to the points you want to

make. You must leave the studio at the end of the interview knowing you've made the most important points as effectively as possible.

Don't try to make too many points. You want to have a maximum of three main lines of argument. Any more and both you and the audience will get lost.

Finish your point. If the interviewer tries to interrupt you before you've got to the important thing you want to say, don't be afraid to carry on talking until you've said it. Sometimes it's useful to say "Just a moment" or "If you'd let me finish". Be assertive without being rude. Don't let yourself be bullied.

Simplicity. Make your points as clearly as possible. Use short sentences and simple words. Try not to use sub-clauses (a sentence within a sentence), as you might confuse the listener.

Turn hostile questions to good account. There are several ways of doing this:

1) Deal with the question quickly, then move on to what you want to talk about. This is the simplest and safest way of handling tricky questions. A good way of going about it is to agree with part of the question, then show that it's not the whole story. "Yes, of course human welfare is critically important, but that doesn't mean we should neglect animal welfare. At the moment, x per cent of all dairy cows die before they're six years old because of the terrible conditions they're kept in. Now that doesn't do them any good or us any good." Or: "Yes, destroying the potatoes will affect the farmer's livelihood to a small extent. But the issues at stake are enormous. If these plants were allowed to reach maturity ..."

2) Deliberately misinterpreting the question. "You're quite right, there were a lot of undesirable elements at the protest. In fact, there's an urgent need to regulate the security industry properly. Do you know that a lot of security guards have criminal records for violent assault? It's symptomatic of the whole road-building industry: they don't care what they do or who they do it to."

3) Undermining the factual content of the question. In other words, don't let the interviewer push you into a corner. (eg Q: "But, given that biotechnology is necessary to feed the world, what you're really doing is putting wildlife before humanity." A: "In fact you're wrong to suggest that biotechnology is necessary to feed the world. By concentrating food production into the hands of a few multinational corporations ...").

But always, always, bring your answer back round to the point.

Leave your notes behind. If what you want to say isn't in your head, you shouldn't be in the studio.

Project. You're not having a casual chat with the interviewer or the other guest. You have come to make some important points, and you must get them across in such a way that the viewer or listener can't possibly ignore them.

This means that you should put more emphasis into your voice than you'd do in a normal conversation. It might sound strange to you when you first do it (and practice it before you do a real interview), but on air it'll sound fine. In fact, if you don't do it, you'll sound flat and boring. TV and radio are all brightness and colour, and you must sound bright and colourful to make an impact. It's a bit of a balancing act, projecting well without ceasing to stay calm.

Use your body. On TV a good rule is that your head and torso should stay fairly still (which makes you seem solid and trustworthy), but your hands should lend emphasis to what you say (they can help to drive your points home). Eyebrows are pretty useful too.

Humour. If you can do it without making it sound frivolous or irrelevant, a bit of humour can help a lot to win your audience over. Gently satirising your opponent's position is often quite

effective. ("Well, let's take a look at this Countryside Alliance. Its main funder is the Duke of Westminster, who, as his name suggests, is a horny-handed son of rural toil. Unfortunately, his rolling green acres in Mayfair and Belgravia keep him in town quite a bit, but at least that allows him to fight off the undemocratic tendencies of the urban oppressor from the benches of the House of Lords...").

Don't hate your opponent. This is perhaps the hardest task of all, but it is absolutely necessary. Whatever you might think about the person you're up against, you must leave your feelings at the door of the studio. If you allow yourself to hate them, you'll lose your cool, lose focus and lose public sympathy. One way of dealing with your feelings is to regard your opponent as someone who has been misled and needs to be told the truth. Think of your role as being to put them right, rather than to put them down, and you'll find that when you go into the studio you'll be a lot less tense.

And remember - when you go into a studio, you are there to tackle one issue and one issue alone, not to put right the ills of the whole world. Concentrate on one task, and you'll make life a great deal easier for yourself.

Part 6: Following up

A. Keeping up your contacts

It's a good idea to write down the names and numbers of all the journalists you meet, and maybe make a brief note of what they're like and how they treated the subject. If you're going to be involved in a long campaign, keep the sympathetic ones informed about it every so often, so that when the next event comes up, they won't have forgotten what it's all about. Share your contact lists and experiences with people in other campaigns: it could help them a lot.

B. Complaining

Activists are treated unfairly by the press more often than any other group of people except gypsies, travellers and asylum seekers. The reasons are not hard to divine: we are challenging powerful vested interests, we are prepared to break the law and, above all, we can be discussed collectively without any fear of libel, as we do not belong to incorporated organisations.

So, for example, the Sunday Times could claim that "eco-terrorist" tree-sitters at Solsbury Hill booby-trapped buildings, attacked guards with catapults and crossbows and dug pitfall traps full of metal stakes, safe in the knowledge that, as long as no one was named, no one could sue, even though the whole bullshit story was refuted by the police. Had it, on the other hand, made the same allegations about security guards, Reliance would have sued the pants off it, even if neither the company nor the guards were named, as Reliance was the only security company on site.

Redressing bullshit stories is difficult, time-consuming and often very frustrating, but sometimes it works. If we don't complain, the media will feel free to do the same thing again and again, so it's worth trying, even if it ends in failure. Here are the options:

If you're fantastically rich, have been named in person and have lots of free time, sue for libel. It's not an option for most of us, but if you know a lawyer who's prepared to work for free and the case is a clear-cut one, it is worth sending a threatening letter. If it's sufficiently convincing, it might prompt the paper or programme to issue an apology and settle out of court: and a few thousand quid for your cause never goes amiss. Don't try it without a lawyer: they'll just laugh it off. There is no legal aid for libel cases.

If you or your movement have been slagged off unfairly in the papers, but there's no possibility of legal redress, there are several other options. None of them are ideal, but they're all better than nothing:

Write a letter for publication. Make sure it's short, pertinent and not personally insulting. Humour and irony are particularly useful weapons.

If you can bear to, talk to the journalist who stitched you up. Be ultra-reasonable and put your case calmly and clearly. Just occasionally, this works, and she or he will relent and write a follow-up piece, putting your side of the story.

This is very long shot but, if you've got good writing skills, see if you can persuade the comment editor to let you write a column putting your case.

Appeal to the Press Complaints Commission. It's a voluntary body set up by the newspapers themselves and is, as a result, pretty useless, even though most of its members are now drawn from outside the press. Its code of practice includes guidance on respect for privacy, the right to reply and journalists' behaviour.

The Press Complaints Commission, 1 Salisbury Square, London EC4 8AE. Fax: 0171 353 8355. Tel: 0171 353 1248

If you've been stitched up by the broadcast media, your prospects are rather better. It's governed by quite a few laws and codes, which are supposed to protect both the public interest and individual rights.

If you've got a small complaint, take it up with the programme concerned: preferably with either the producer or the series editor. If you don't get satisfaction, try one of the following:

If it's a BBC TV or radio programme: The BBC Programme Complaints Unit, BBC Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

If it's an ITV programme: The Independent Television Commission, 33 Foley Street, London W1P 7LB. Fax: 0171 306 7800. Tel: 0171 255 3000. Email: 100731.3515@compuserve.com

If it's an independent radio programme: The Radio Authority, Holbrook House, 14 Great Queen Street, London WC2B 5DG. Fax: 0171 405 7064. Tel: 0171 430 2724.

If you've got a major complaint, contact the Broadcasting Standards Commission, as well as one of the above. BSC, 7 The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JS. Fax: 0171 233 0544. Tel: 0171 222 3172.

In all cases, make sure you include the name and date of the programme. Be prepared for a long wait, and keep on their case.

Cumbersome and slow as it is, complaining about unfairness in the broadcast media can be spectacularly worthwhile, as the producers of Channel 4's asinine Against Nature series found to their cost. Following thousands of viewer complaints, the Independent Television Commission delivered one of the most damning verdicts in its history, with the result that Channel 4 had to make a humiliating prime-time apology and the series director, Martin Durkin, had to resign from the company he works for. With luck, he will never work in mainstream television again.

Remember: if they stitch you up and you don't complain, they'll do it to you again and again.

Part 7: Conclusion

All campaigning is hard work, and exploiting the media is just as hard as any other aspect. We've tended to neglect it in the past, and then wonder why no one comes to our actions. Our movement needs specialist media workers just as much as it needs specialist tree-climbers. The more there are, the more clearly our message will come across, and the more people will be attracted to our cause. This is how small rumblings turn into earthquakes. The revolution will be televised, but that doesn't mean that it won't also be live.

Taken from the [UHC Collective](#) website

Press release guide

Advice and tips on how to make an effective press release or media advisory.

What is a media advisory?

A media advisory is a means of notifying the press of an event or news story that will happen in the future. It is essentially an event reminder that is in a format that makes it easy for journalists to record the event in their calendars or day planners. It is a proactive way for activists to inform news outlets of events and actions that you want publicized in the future. ALWAYS fax the media advisory, do not e-mail it. There are only two exceptions to this rule: 1) If the media outlet does not have a fax. 2) If you have e-mail addresses of individual journalists, you may e-mail media advisories to those individuals. But, whether you are faxing or e-mailing, you will use the same format below. When faxing the media advisory, you should use standard letter size (8 1/2 x 11) paper, use letterhead and organization logos at the top of the page. The media advisory should fit on one page – remember, this is for a reporters day planner so be brief. if you e-mail the media advisory, send the e-mail as plain text only.

A sample media advisory

Media advisory

January 21, 2003

"Dismantling the Police State"

Optional short descriptive paragraph about the event here.

WHAT: Teach-in on police brutality and the prison industrial complex.

WHO: John Jones of People Against Bad Stuff (PABF), Mary May of the Down with Cops Organization (DCO), and Tim Timmy of the Anarchist Association of America (AAA)

WHEN: 10 a.m. Thursday, February 6

WHERE: Unitarian Church, 555 N 5th St., East Jesus, Ohio

BACKGROUND: (optional field keep it to a single paragraph) blah blah blah...

NOTES: (optional field keep it to a single paragraph) blah blah blah...

CONTACT: Jane Doe: (xxx) xxx-xxxx janedoe@janedoe.org

What is a Press Release?

A press release is a means of informing the press of an event or action that will happen or has happened or is in progress, a newsworthy development (such as the results of an investigation) or any other activity that your group is involved in which may be of interest to journalists. It is the standard means for communicating information about an event or action that you want the press to cover. Press releases should generally be faxed to the news outlet unless you know they accept e-mail press releases, in which case you can send it either way. After you send the press release, it is very important to call the news outlet and inquire if they received it.

How to write effective press releases

There are very specific formats for writing press releases and if you want to improve the odds that your press releases will be read, you must follow them. Furthermore, since the standard press release format is designed to efficiently transmit information, you have every incentive to use the proper format to get your job done well.

Getting started

To start, you will need to develop press release letterhead. Although styles vary, a typical press release contains the name of the organization, its address and its phone number on the top left and the words "News," "Press Release," or "Media Release" on the top right.

Typically, press release letterhead is on legal size paper (8 1/2" x 14"), although standard letter size (8 1/2" x 11") is also considered appropriate.

You'll also need a #10 (standard business size) carrier envelope that matches your press release letterhead in style, ink color and paper color. It is permissible to use larger envelopes if your release is to be accompanied by other items too large for a #10 envelope, such as photographs, sample copies of books, etc.

At the top of your releases, you should type "For Release: Immediate" or "For Release: Date." If you do not want journalists to use the information until a certain time, type "Embargoed Until (Date and Time)" after the "For Release." On the right, directly across from the "For Release" information, you should type "Contact:" and then the name or names of the person(s) who will be available to answer questions from the media. The individuals' phone numbers should be included under their names.

The slug

The first bit of text in a press release is called the slug. This refers to the title, or headline, on the release. The slug should very briefly summarize the topic of the release and, if at all possible, utilize action verbs to sound as interesting and as newsworthy as possible.

The inverted triangle

A good press release follows what is known as the inverted triangle. The inverted triangle means that information should begin with the most important information. The next paragraph should contain slightly less important information, and so on, until the very last bit of information in the release is the least important. If you have written a release correctly, it should be possible to cut off the bottom half of the release and still provide journalists with sufficient information.

The inverted triangle format is important because journalists receive large numbers of press releases each day. Time constraints may force them to read only the beginning of a release before deciding if they will use the material or throw the release away. It is therefore in your interest to present information in an efficient and straight forward manner so that journalists can access the information quickly.

The lead

The lead is the first sentence or paragraph of a press release. It should contain what is known as the five w's: who, what, where, when and why. These five w's give journalists what they need to know in order to pursue your story. Memorize them and make sure they appear in your lead.

Style

Keep the release short and succinct. A press release should rarely go over one page. Always type a release and use wide margins. It is common for releases to be typed double-spaced to allow journalists to take notes on the release itself. If you don't choose to do so, at least leave space between paragraphs. Paragraphs and sentences should be kept short. Use exact dates whenever possible (for example, "Monday, June 5" or even "June 5" is more informative than "next Monday.") When using numbers in text, spell out numbers one through ten. For all other numbers use numerals.

Objectivity

Press releases are designed to transmit facts. Opinions should not be included unless they are

clearly identified as such. One way to convey opinion is by including a quote from someone in your group. Make certain that the quote is clearly attributed.

Closing symbols

At the end of a release, you must indicate to journalists that the release is over. There are two commonly-accepted symbols that indicate this. The first is "-30-" and the second "###". Use either at the end of your release, placing whichever you choose in the lower center of the page. In the rare instances that your release goes over one page, type "MORE" at the bottom of any page that is not your last page. Again, this should be centered.

By Shawn Ewald and Adam Weissman

E-mail press releases

Distribute email press releases in plain ASCII text.

Draft your press release as you would any other email message, using an email software program. Never send press releases as attachments to email, or attach other documents to email press releases. If you need to prepare a paper copy of the press release, copy and paste the ASCII text into a word processing document after the release is written in the email program.

Keep the text brief and focused.

An electronic press release should follow the same "pyramid" format as any other press release. Start with the most important information (and remember the five "W's" - who, what, where, when and why). Use short paragraphs and keep it brief.

Write a subject line that's compelling or provocative.

Keep in mind that the subject line is the first thing reporters will see when they download your release. Never email a press release (or any other message) with a blank subject line.

Include your electronic contact information.

Remember to include your email address and Web site URL in addition to your phone and fax number, and address. Put all your contact information at the top of the press release.

Use hyper-links where appropriate.

If there is additional information available on your Web site -- such as a white paper or an event announcement -- include a hyper-link so reporters can click right to it. Online publications will often include these links in their stories, making this an effective way to direct visitors to your Web site.

Send a test message before distributing your press release.

Always send a copy of the press release to yourself or to a colleague before distributing it. Check the format to make sure there are no broken lines of text, and check for any mistyped Web URLs by testing them to make sure they work.

Avoid disclosing the recipients' email addresses.

Always type the recipients' addresses in the "Bcc" field of your email message header, rather than in the "To" or "Cc" field.

Post your organization's media contact information on the home page of your Web site. Be sure to keep the contact information up-to-date, and include information on how reporters can be added to your mailing list.

Treat email media inquiries the same as phone inquiries.

Always respond just as promptly to email media inquiries as you would to phone calls. Reporters who work for online publications are much more likely to contact you by email than by phone. If you're responsible for answering media inquiries, check your email frequently throughout the day.

Set up an online archive for your media communications.

Set aside an area of your Web site where reporters can locate past press releases. (If you publish a newsletter in electronic form, maintain an online archive of past issues, as well.)

Post press releases only to appropriate lists, news groups, and publications.

If you plan to post your press release to any email discussion lists, news groups or online publications, make sure the topic of your release is appropriate content for the list or Web site. If your press release announces a new report on air pollution, it would not be appropriate content for a forum for race car enthusiasts, for example.

Collect email addresses from your media contacts.

If you've been distributing your press releases by fax or postal mail, ask your media contacts if you can switch to email distribution. Major newspapers frequently have separate staffs for their online versions, so you'll need to include those contacts on your list, too. There are also media directories and news services specifically for online publications that may be appropriate to add to your media list.

Excerpted from [The Virtual Activist](#) with modifications by Shawn Ewald.

Radio interview guide



A guide on how best to get your message across while being interviewed on the radio.

If you are part of a political or campaign group, talk radio is one of the most effective ways to reach your audience. The opportunities afforded are unparalleled.

Equipment needed

A telephone is all the equipment you need. With a simple phone, you can be interviewed from anywhere — from home, your office, or even a hotel room. My favorite "studio" is in my office facing my computer. Additionally, I use a telephone headset, which I highly recommend.

One benefit of a headset is free hands. With free hands you have the freedom to access reference materials, your computer, and jot down notes while you are talking. Before doing a show, I bring up a "radio" file on my computer. In this file I have all sorts of useful information for the interview (more on this later). I also use the computer to type notes to myself. For instance, during the breaks many ideas come to mind for the next segment. I quickly write down these ideas. Some hosts have a knack for throwing their guests off target, so you want to do everything you can to stay focused. The one other thing I always have on hand is a big glass of water.

Getting on talk shows

Talk radio hosts are always looking for interesting, informative, and provocative guests — not necessarily in that order. Actually, depending upon the size of the station, it's often the "producer" who finds and schedules guests. However, you don't need to know producers to get on a talk show.

Unless your issues have national impact, you should limit your exposure to the community in which your group operates. One advantage to doing local radio shows is that you can be interviewed in the radio station's sound studio. Using a studio mike results in better audio quality than when you use a telephone. Another advantage is face to face visual cues often help during an interview.

If your group's interest is national in scope, you might want to start with talk shows in your city, then appear on shows in other communities. Nationally syndicated shows will save you time by hitting many cities at once.

How to start

If your group has a publication, add the names of known talk show hosts to your mailing list. Also, send them newspaper clippings about your group, press releases, and brochures. If you or someone in your organisation writes a book related to the purpose of your group, send book reviews or a sample copy to the radio station. (Your publisher may assist you in this.) Be sure to include contact information so producers will know whom to contact.

Simply sending timely material will most likely get you on the air. If your organisation is national in scope, there's another cost-effective way to get your spokesperson on shows all over the country. In the US, for example, Bradley Communications, of Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, publishes Radio-TV Interview Report — The Magazine to Read for Guests & Show Ideas. Published three times a month, this excellent magazine is sent to 4,000 hosts and producers. Each issue contains 64 pages of display ads from experts and opinion makers. You can look for similar publications in your country.

When planning our next media strategy, I always consider advertising in Radio-TV Interview Report. Because of its frequency and reach, activists can organiae a radio blitz lasting a few weeks, or even months. I continue to get calls months after my ads run. The staff at Radio-TV Interview Report will write your ad for you. All you have to do is supply the information you want talk show hosts to have about you and your group. This information might include your group's newsletter or magazine, a book, a photo (for TV), or a press release. You'll receive a fax of your ad copy for your approval before it runs. You can run your ad once, three times a month, or once a month for as long as you like; it's up to you. Radio-TV Interview Report has never failed to get me on more shows than I could handle, easily justifying the cost of the ads. You might also land some TV talk shows. (To contact Radio-TV Interview Report, write to PO Box 1206, Lansdowne, PA 19050-8206, or call Jack Lewis at 610-259-8206, ext. 408.)

When a producer calls

When a producer calls, make sure you learn the name of the host, the radio station, and its location. You should also ask about the host's position on the issues you'll be discussing. Although it doesn't matter what your host's positions are, it's good to know in advance.

For some reason, Christian stations often try to hide that fact from me; then attempt to ambush me on the air (this is obviously less of an issue in the UK - libcom). I still do those stations, but I like to know in advance if they have a Christian format. Recently, I've begun to look for a station's call letters in the National Religious Broadcasters' Directory of Religious Media.

Ask how long you'll be on; don't assume it'll be an hour, it might be less. Many of my appearances have been extended for an extra hour or so. It all depends on audience response — and whether another guest is scheduled to follow you. You want to be sure you have enough material on hand for a longer show. Most programs are live, and because of callers, are the most interesting. Occasionally, the host will tape your interview for a later airing.

Write down the producer's name and phone number. If you have to cancel, call as far in advance as you can. When setting the date and time, be sure you understand what time zone the show is in. Don't forget to write down all this information in your appointment book.

What to expect on the air

Here are some of the notes I have in my computer's "radio" file. I have a collection of one-liners I've successfully used as retorts, facts and legal cases regarding my issue, talking points, and even a few interesting quotations.

Before each interview I type in the station's call letters, city, and the host's and producer's names. Then I add personal notes, such as Relax, enjoy yourself, use and keep a sense of humor, remember you don't have to answer every question, answer questions with questions when appropriate, promote issue X. While all this may sound trite, sometimes in the heat of a talk show these things are easily forgotten. I also prepare a brief opening statement, and a note to myself about what issues to focus on during the program.

A friendly host will support and guide you during the show. Even the most hostile host is just doing it for effect, and, if you know your material, you'll do fine. Most callers are polite — but often ill-informed. An experienced host will keep the unruly ones in line, sometimes by cutting them off.

Don't "read" any statements, including your opening remarks. Remember not to say anything that you would not want to go out over the air. You may think you're off the air when you're not. Keep your remarks short, develop good sound bites, and have plenty of facts on hand. Never attack the host or callers. Above all, be yourself. Keep cool and maintain a sense of humor.

It's extremely helpful to provide contact information — an 800 number, or a simple address — so listeners can reach you. It's also a good idea to make a free offer, such as a copy of your newsletter. Remember, you're on the air to promote the mission of your group, advance a cause, or deal with specific issues. Stay on target

Excerpted from "Say it on the radio", Institute for First Amendment Studies with modifications by Shawn Ewald

Housing guide



A page of advice on taking action to house yourself cheaply and know your rights, in a time when buying a property is beyond many people, council housing is being sold off, rents are rising and hundreds of thousands are homeless.

In the UK - the world's 4th richest country, 400,000 people are homeless. Meanwhile, over 700,000 properties lie empty¹. If you want to take direct action to house yourself, read on...

- [1.](#) Source: Shelter

Setting up housing co-operatives guide



Some tips on how to set up a housing co-operative. Co-ops can be an affordable way of housing yourself if you can't afford to buy, and you don't want to be beholden to or exploited by a landlord.

Many housing co-ops are state funded; the Housing Corporation puts up much of the funding, and therefore can, on the whole, call the tune. However; it is possible to set up a housing co-op which is totally independent.

Essentially, a registered housing co-op is a legal entity which is separate from its members, and it allows those members to co-operate to raise loans, even if, individually, they have limited access to money or credit. With these loans they can purchase secure housing which they themselves control. The members of an independent housing co-op are tenants paying rent, (and so are eligible for housing benefit), but are also their own landlord.

The 'housing' for a co-op could be chosen to exactly suit the needs of the members. It could include extra resources - space, land, workshops, gardens, extra children's spaces. It could be a large or small shared house, flats, a small terrace, a residential mobile home park, a smallholding. It could be established just to provide housing, and an alternative to the low

standards and constant insecurity of private rented accommodation. Or it could be set up with the intention of promoting wider aims, such as providing space for self-employment, supporting home education, giving a secure base for a group of people who are encouraged on a shared project, and it allows the members to tailor the property, once chosen, to exactly suit their special needs.

It may take some patience and determination to set up a housing co-op and see it through to fruition, but then the members can reap the reward of relative autonomy in an important area of life, and rents which can decrease over the years as loans are repaid, rather than constantly increase as all other rents do. Housing benefit acts as a conduit to channel public funds into the pockets of private landlords, and although it passes through the hands of tenants, it leaves them with no long-term improvement, and no control. A family on housing benefit could, over only five or six years, claim enough housing benefit to have BOUGHT a small house outright, but of course that benefit is actually accruing to the landlord, not the family in need. They can still be made homeless at four weeks notice, with all the knock-on problems that has for work, education and social networks, whilst the landlord has enlarged his asset base with public money and virtually no work.

1. Get a group of people who will commit themselves to working together to make their common idea become reality. Unless you come as a ready-made group, establishing that common idea is perhaps the hardest part. Contact existing co-ops, especially if there are any in your area. Gather information, ask for help from the co-op network. Send for the invaluable booklet 'How To Set Up A Housing Co-op' from Radical Routes, and contact the Catalyst Collective (both addresses at the end).

2. Register as an Industrial and Provident Society. This is done through the Registrar of Friendly Societies, and gives a group the legal structure that is required. The co-op needs to be defined as 'Not-for-profit' - members cannot make any financial gain out of it as individuals.

Limited Company - members do not carry personal liability for the debts of the co-op, (although of course they will lose their home if they don't pay the mortgage).

Fully Mutual - all tenants must be members and all members must be either present or prospective tenants.

Common Ownership - the property is owned by the housing co-op. The members may loan money to the co-op (and receive interest) but they do not own an individual share of the property if the property is sold, members cannot divide any 'profit' up amongst themselves -it must be used to buy another co-op property or passed to another not-for-profit organisation. Co-ops are about developing housing as a resource, not about treating it as a commodity with which to make money.

3. Work out how to raise the money. This is usually done by getting a 70% or 80% mortgage and raising the rest by issuing Loanstock (see below), and possibly getting a loan from some other group such as Radical Routes (see below). Many co-ops have got mortgages either from Triodos Bank or the Ecology Building Society: before presenting your idea to a bank or other funding source, ask around other independent co-ops to find out what the banks' loan criteria are, as they vary from one bank to another. Again, two major sources of advice and help are the Catalyst Collective and the Radical Routes network.

4. Find a property. Start looking at properties which will suit your aims and will be able to generate enough rent (at local Housing Benefit levels) to repay the mortgage and loans, and cover the running costs (maintenance etc.). Houses are more expensive in some parts of the country than others, but then Housing Benefit levels are generally higher in those areas. Even if most or all members are working, the bank will probably still want to see that the co-op

could continue to meet the mortgage repayments if at a later date most tenants were having to claim housing benefit.

It is the co-op as a legal entity that gets the mortgage, not the individual members, so a sound cash-flow forecast is more important than whether all or any of the members are employed.

Loanstock

As a registered Industrial and Provident Society the co-op is allowed to raise money by issuing loanstock to both members and non-members. This is a way of borrowing money from sympathisers without relinquishing any control over the co-op to them. If members themselves lend to the co-op in this way, it ensures that the member who has £5000 to put in does not have any more stake or power in the co-op than the member who invested £50.

Radical Routes

Radical Routes is a mutual aid self-help network which has been responsible for much of the spade-work involved in establishing the route to independent tenant-controlled co-ops described here. Membership of Radical Routes is restricted to housing and worker co-ops actively working towards a shared social and political vision. The network has a solid knowledge of both the legalities and practicalities of setting up co-ops.

Radical Routes also operates an ethical investment scheme through which it can make loans to member co-ops, and it publishes various useful booklets, especially the vital 'How To Set Up A Housing Co-op'.

Catalyst Collective

Another source of help is the Catalyst Collective, who will give advice and also offer a registration service to see you through the process. They produce a pre-registration pack which includes a huge amount of useful information, from setting up a co-op to producing a cash-flow forecast and doing the accounts.

Housing co-ops - useful addresses

Radical Routes Email: inforadicalroutes.org.uk www.radicalroutes.org.uk

Catalyst Collective infocatalystcollective.co.uk also our postal address is: highbury farm, redbrook, monmouthshire, np25 4lx phone: 01600 775414 www.catalystcollective.co.uk

Registrar of Friendly Societies Victory House, 30-34 Kingsway, London WC2B 6ES, Tel .020 7437 9992

Triodos Bank Brunel House, 11 The Promenade, Bristol BS8 3NN

Ecology Building Society, 18 Station Road, Cross Hills, Keighley, W Yorkshire BD20 7EH

This text was taken and edited from schnews.org.uk

Edited by libcom.org. Last reviewed 2006

Squatting guide



This is a brief guide to the completely legal activity of squatting - occupying an empty property and making it your home.

It helps avoid homelessness, since renting or buying a house can be prohibitively expensive for many people.

There is a fair chance that you may believe squatting in England and Wales to be illegal. This is most definitely not the case. Squatting is not a crime, and if anyone says it is, they are wrong! With a few exceptions, if you can get into an empty building without doing any damage and can secure it, you can make it your home.

The 1994 Criminal Justice & Public Order Act has made some changes to the laws about squatting but it is still as legal as it is necessary. Always remember that squatting is unlawful, not illegal which means that it is a civil dispute, dealt with by a civil court; and the police have nothing to do with civil disputes.

You will almost certainly be evicted eventually, perhaps very quickly, but you have the same rights as other householders; the right to privacy, rubbish collection, postal delivery, social security and essential services like water and electricity. Many squats last only a time but if you choose your place carefully, you may be able to stay for years (pictured above is St Agnes Place, a whole street in South London squatted for over 30 years). Choosing carefully usually means taking time to gather information. You could quite easily open the first empty building that you come across, but the chances are that you would not stay there forever. Opening a new squat is always a bit of a gamble but the more you know the better your odds. Read on!

Finding a place

All property is owned by someone and it is a good to find out who that someone is before breaking a new place. Some types of landlord are far easier to deal with than others, so here are a few tips on what to expect from various landlords:

Council Property: In the past the best places to squat have been local authority owned properties that are not going to be re-let. This is for a number of reasons. Councils have a lot of empty properties and often do not have the money to keep them in a lettable state. Often quite reasonable properties are left empty because of mismanagement, bureaucracy or low demand on hard to let estates (as people do not want to move to them). If there are a lot of squatters the council will take longer to evict people. Some councils or individual employees may be unofficially sympathetic to squatters and leave eviction until the properties are required. Also, councils do have some duties to house people and these duties can sometimes be used as legal defences in possession proceedings. Be warned, though, that recently more and more Councils have become more hard line in their attitudes towards squatters, and in fact any-one living in council property; and the incidences of false PIOs, illegal or heavy-

handed evictions and trashing property have increased. Council properties will either be letting stock, (i.e. properties fit to be let), hard to let or awaiting renovation, demolition or sale.

Housing Associations/Trusts: These are government and or charitably funded housing organisations. They also have large numbers of empty properties and some are quite reasonable in their attitude to squatters. Others can be particularly stupid - and nasty. The different categories of Housing Association property are basically the same as Council property.

Other Large Organisations: Many government departments and newly privatised quangos own lots of empty properties. These include the MOD, the police and railway companies, as well as hospitals and schools.

Mortgage Repossessions: These are places owned by banks or building societies, and are an attractive option simply because there are huge numbers of them. As long as the previous owners have been evicted, the owners will have to take you to court.

Commercial Property: Private landlords and property companies are always the most unpredictable type of owner - they could send in the heavies or ignore you for years. They are the type of owner most likely to evict you if you leave the place empty. In the past few years many pubs have been closed and left empty for years, and have sometimes been successfully squatted.

Private Houses: Empty houses with 'For Sale' signs outside are not a good option. If an owner has recently moved out, it is quite likely that someone else is about to move in and so would be very inconvenienced. A new private owner is able to use the PIO provisions of Section 7, and is highly likely to do so. Best avoided.

Moving in

The most difficult part of squatting is actually gaining possession. Squatters are sometimes arrested for Criminal Damage, which, taken in its strictest possible form, is an offence which almost all squatters commit. Removing steel doors, boards, damaging the front door, even taking out broken parts of a house can be considered Criminal Damage. But don't get paranoid! Only a very small minority of squatters ever get nicked - and with good legal advice they often get off. The greatest time of risk is when you have just moved in - the police are bound to come nosing around and may accuse you of having smashed windows, etc. If any damage has been done, make sure it's repaired immediately.

Opening a squat by yourself can be risky - it's safer and more fun to do it with others. Most forcible evictions happen in the first few days, so make sure there's a group of you who open up the squat and are ready to move in at once. If the police want to charge you with criminal damage, they'll have to sort out who actually did it. Provided no one is caught red-handed or makes any stupid statements, they will obviously have a difficult time deciding who to charge. The first thing to do once you're in is to change the lock on the front door and secure all the entrances. Until you have control over who comes in and out, you do not have possession and can be evicted straight away if the owner or police turn up. Remember secure all windows and skylights. Putting up a legal warning (see below) in a front window may be helpful, as it may deter the police or owner from breaking in, but you must have someone in the place all the time to back it up. A legal warning will not stop you being evicted on its own. Put up curtains and try to make the place look lived in. Get down to the gas and electric board quickly - before the owners do. If the services are on, take a note of the meter readings. If you use gas or electricity without paying, you can be charged with theft. If you have neighbours, and enlist their support. Explain why you are homeless - you may get a surprisingly sympathetic response.

Dealing with the police

It's best to expect a visit from the local police soon after you've moved in, as they are bound to turn up sooner or later. Remember, they have no right of entry without a warrant, so don't let them in if you can avoid it. Let them know the situation. Say something like:-

"We have moved in here because we have nowhere else. We did not break anything when entered and we have not damaged anything since. It isn't a criminal matter; it's a civil matter between us and the owners, and they must take us to court for a possession order if they want us to leave".

Some police act as if they can evict or arrest any squatter they see. This is not true. Try to talk to them through the letter box. Make sure you know the legal situation better than they do (not usually very difficult) and show them a copy of the Legal Warning. If they simply say "get out, don't be clever", etc you can point out that they may be committing an offence under section 6 of the Criminal Law Act, because they will be violently entering premises where there is some opposing their entry.

Eviction

Unless you are evicted under Section 6 or 7 of the 1977 Criminal Law Act or the owners have evicted you while you were out, the owner must apply the courts for a possession order. Any other method will probably be illegal. Nearly all squats are evicted after a possession order has been made by a court. The notorious 1994 Criminal Justice & Public Order Act has not actually changed the position very much. Apart from a few minor changes to the law about PIOS, it has produced an extra type of possession order called an INTERIM POSSESSION ORDER (IPO). This can be nasty, but has turned out to be not nearly so bad as everyone thought when it was going through parliament. It cannot be used on the majority of squatters, and so far there have very few IPOs. Most IPOs which squatters defended have flopped and the owners have been forced to use the old procedures instead. The important thing about IPOs is that you get very short notice. You need to take action THE SAME DAY as you get served with the papers. Get legal advice straight away.

The first warning

The first warning you get may be someone calling your squat saying they are the owner or are acting for the owner. Ask to see their identification and note the name, address and phone number. They will probably say something like, "You are trespassing and you must leave". They may also give you some bullshit about the new IPO procedure and say that the police could come and arrest you at any time. Make sure you know the facts about IPOs and don't get intimidated by this sort of talk. Make a note of everything you heard and said as soon as they leave. Sign and date it, as it may be useful evidence if you fight the court case. They will probably ask for the names of all living in the squat, and there is no advantage in withholding this information. If you volunteer a lot of names - particularly in a big squat – and they forget to send summonses to all those people, you may have a defence in court. You don't have to give your real name, but if you fight the case and require legal aid, you can't get it in a false name!

Quite often the first warning will be a letter rather than a visit. It will say the same sort of things and probably that you must leave by a certain date or else the owner "will take proceedings". Don't panic about such a letter. It just means the owner has found out that you're there.

It's quite possible that the first warning you get will be the summons. A summons is the formal notice of the court hearing, and you have the right to get one. These are civil courts, not criminal ones, so you don't have to go if you don't want to. It's more of an invitation, but one you should think about accepting if you value your home and want to fight for it. Of

course, some cases are not worth fighting if there is no defence. You may be better off looking for another place than putting energy into a court case that will go against you sooner or later. On the other hand, even technical defences can give you a little more time and sometimes quite a lot. IP0s should always be opposed if possible.

It is beyond the space limitations of this guide, to go into the details of fighting court cases, and it is recommended that you get hold of a copy of the Squatters Handbook which contains stacks of info on every aspect of squatting (details below).

Squat now while stocks last!

If you are homeless and have tried all the accepted ways of getting a home, don't be afraid to take matters into your own hands instead of letting the system grind you down. Everyone has the right to a home. If others can squat, so can you. Take control of your own life instead of being pushed around by bureaucrats and property owners who are more concerned with money and status than the quality of people's lives or their happiness.

This article has been made with extracts of The Squatters Handbook, which is published by Advisory Service for Squatters, 2 St Pauls Road, London N1 2QN Tel: 020 7359 8814 www.squatters.org.uk.

This text was taken and edited from schnews.org.uk by libcom.org. Last reviewed 2006.

Section 6 legal notice for squats



A legal warning notice on Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 which protects the rights of occupiers of properties.

If you are squatting it is strongly advised you display this notice to inform people of your rights - and let them know that you are aware of your rights

LEGAL WARNING

Section 6 Criminal Law Act 1977

As amended by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

TAKE NOTICE

THAT we live in this property, it is our home and we intend to stay here.

THAT at all times there is at least one person in this property.

THAT any entry or attempt to enter into this property without our permission is a criminal offence as any one of us who is in physical possession is opposed to entry without our permission.

THAT if you attempt to enter by violence or by threatening violence we will prosecute you. You may receive a sentence of up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000.

THAT if you want to get us out you will have to take out a summons for possession in the County Court or in the High Court, or produce to us a written statement or certificate in terms of S.12A Criminal Law Act, 1977 (as inserted by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994).

THAT it is an offence under S.12A (8) Criminal Law Act 1977 (as amended) to knowingly make a false statement to obtain a written statement for the purposes of S. 12A. A person guilty of such an offence may receive a sentence of up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000.

Signed

The Occupiers

N.B. Signing this Legal warning is optional. It is equally valid whether or not it is signed.

Text taken from the [UHC Collective](#) website

Edited by libcom.org. Last reviewed 2006

Personal guides

The advice contained in this section won't change the world, but it can help you improve your life by helping you not get messed around by debt collectors, social services or the police.

These ideas could also be used to organise around in community or workplace campaigns. Why not print them out, put them in a local newsletter or email them to friends?

Office worker's survival guide



The modern office is fraught with dangers. From the risk of getting fired, to stress, repetitive strain injury (RSI), mindnumbing boredom and more. This helpful guide from libcom.org will help you navigate these hazards to a happy [work life](#), and perhaps a slightly better world...

Of course not all of the tips will be appropriate in every setting so pick and choose the right ones for you, depending on how safe your job is how much you care about it.

Appearance

A vitally important aspect of office life is how you come across to management and colleagues. If you want the kudos of being a hard worker, without all the bothersome hard work, then you need to look the part:

- Always look busy.
- Keep your desk covered in piles of paperwork.
- Don't say yes to meeting invitations right away, always check your diary first (even if you know you don't have anything in it) and frequently say you can't make certain times, and suggest others instead.
- Have loads of programme windows open on your computer. This helps mask your web browser windows!
- Often have your voicemail box be full. Fill it with messages yourself if necessary.
- Wherever you go, take files with you. If you walk briskly with files, you can go chat to colleagues, go for a walk, etc but it will look like you are going to do something important.
- Instead of actually working late, just leave your monitor on and leave a cardigan on the back of your office chair to make it look like you are still at the office when actually you're already at home with your feet up watching Gossip Girl. You could even leave a half empty cup of tea/coffee on occasion, and maybe even a half eaten bourbon biscuit (or other crappy biscuit, you wouldn't want to waste a good one).
- Eat lunch at your desk - but after actually taking your full lunch break off. Thus maximising your free time and looking like a dedicated employee.
- Help out workmates with little jobs. It makes you look helpful, and can make you popular, while not causing too much stress, and it makes life easier for them. And of course it makes others more likely to help you out when you're overloaded or don't know how to do something.



Taking it easy

Stress kills. Not only that, but working too fast is antisocial behaviour. If that sounds odd, let me explain: slow [work](#) means that more workers are needed. More workers means lower unemployment. Low unemployment means greater demand for labour, which puts an upward pressure on wages. So working fast means higher unemployment and lower wages. It also singles out those unable to work quickly enough, such as some disabled or elderly staff, putting them at risk of dismissal. Don't do it!

- Take the breaks you are entitled to. Look at your legal rights in your country, and your employer's procedures and practices. Encourage colleagues to do the same so individuals can't be singled out.
- Take additional breaks wherever you can. Many office-based workplaces will have [health and safety](#) policies recommending 5 to 10 min breaks every hour to help prevent RSI/eyestrain etc. Take them! You can also sneak breaks by smoking, or

better for your health go out and chat with smoker colleagues on their breaks: after all, it wouldn't be fair if non-smokers weren't allowed similar breaks.

- If you figure out a way to make your work quicker, or make the process more efficient, don't tell your boss! They may just give you extra work or worse reduce your hours or make staff redundant. Keep your innovation to yourself and use your additional time to do things you want to do, like write your novel or send personal e-mails. You could always offer to take on a little bit more work, to make yourself look efficient without giving away how much free time you really have.
- If in your job you get the chance to work from home, try to get the work done in advance but don't give it to the boss. Then when you're at home sit around in your dressing gown eating Doritos and masturbating, and every couple of hours just send in a bit of work you had already completed.
- Informally with workmates try to establish a rate of work which you are all happy with and which isn't too fast, and don't let management know what you're doing! If a new member of staff starts make sure you induct them into how you do things.
- Take sickies when you need them. If you can find out what the average sickness absences at your workplace, make sure you get at least the average. Aside from giving you a break, it can help prevent discrimination against any disabled workers who have to take time off. If colleagues get annoyed about people being off sick, encourage them to take time off as well to level the playing field.
- Volunteer to do jobs which take you out of the office. Not only does this make you look helpful, but it can give you the opportunity to go to a cafe, go around the shops, sit in a park, etc.
- If you suffer from mental health problems or another disability and you are overworked, your employer may be required to make adjustments for you, which could include reducing your workload. Get advice on this from a trade union, or advocacy organisation in your area.
- If you and your colleagues are all overloaded, meet together and try to collectively agree a way to challenge it. You can have a look at our [workplace organising section](#) for suggestions on how to do this.

Making the most of your pay

As wage slaves, the money is why we turn up each day. Obviously, the more of it for the least work the better for workers, although of course the [opposite is true for our employers](#) (here lies the central contradiction of [capitalism](#)). So they are always coming up with ways to try to get us to do more work for less. Here are some ways of turning the tables...

- Eat breakfast at work. Why get up earlier and eat at home, when you could be getting paid to have breakfast?! (Depending on your workplace there may also be free coffee and milk)
- Steal as much as humanly possible. Work steals our whole lives, so never feel bad about this, as we could never steal back everything which is taken from us. From time (doing what we want to do, rather than what the boss wants us to do) to stationery, to tea and coffee to computer equipment and beyond - get everything you can making sure you don't get caught.

- If management don't always see when you get in or when you leave, arrange with your workmates to take it in turns to get in late and leave early. If you use time cards, punch each other in.
- Try not to work any unpaid overtime, and encourage colleagues to do the same so "troublemakers" can't be victimised.
- Go to the toilet in work time when possible. Don't go in your lunch break, as you probably won't be getting paid for it. And you'll save money on toilet paper.
- Make the most of your work printers and photocopiers. Print out your personal photos, long texts you've downloaded and would like to read, photocopy revolutionary pamphlets, leaflets, posters and anything else you can think of.
- Take a look at our [sabotage section](#) which is full of [accounts](#) of workers slacking off on the job and getting the most out of their employers.

Not getting fired

Some jobs are more secure than others. Your risk of getting fired also varies greatly depending on the country you live in and your employment status (agency, permanent, etc). So here are some general tips to make it less likely as whatever your situation:

- Try to make yourself indispensable. Try to either get or hold onto some important responsibilities. If you are the only one who knows how to do something, guard this knowledge closely. Keep shortcuts you know for doing things quickly to yourself.
- Know your rights. Read up on your employment rights in your area and for your type of contract, and your employer's procedures. The more you know the better position you will be in to protect yourself from dismissal.
- Join a union. If there is a recognised union at your workplace, you should join it as an insurance policy. Look into their track record first to see if it is worthwhile. If there isn't a recognised union depending on where you are you could join a general union which might be able to represent you if you got in trouble.
- Get to know your employer's code of conduct and acceptable behaviour, so you know what lines not cross.
- Hide the fact you're a slacker!
- The best defence against redundancy or disciplinary firing is the solidarity of your workmates. If you can get your co-workers to stick together and take action to defend each other this is the most effective way of stopping dismissals. See our [workplace organising guide](#) for suggestions on how to do this, or our [workplace activity section](#) to read the organising experiences of others.



The internet

The internet can be a bit of a minefield at work. On the one hand it offers more opportunities for rewarding shirking than ever before (I have often wondered what office workers did in the days before the net, just stare at their typewriters?). On the other hand, it is easy for employers to monitor and can get you fired. In general you could take your cues from other colleagues, especially more long serving staff. If you know that lots of people surf the web all the time, and no one has ever been disciplined then maybe you can relax. But you should be aware that employers can easily track all internet and e-mail use, and can discipline or

dismiss workers easily for personal use of them. These tips are based on it being better safe than sorry:

- If you are someone who management doesn't like, or if your employer is going to be making redundancies, it can be advisable to be on best behaviour with respect to internet use, because some employers can use workers' web use to sack people they don't like, or to make redundancies on the cheap. Pointing out others being worse than you won't help you.
- Steer clear of any indecent/profane material. This can definitely get you sacked, and many employers use software which automatically looks for swear words on your screen or in e-mails, so stay away from it.
- If you have a smart phone or tablet computer with mobile internet you can either legitimately or sneakily use, that would be a safer way of browsing without your boss being able to track it.
- If you are going to browse the net at work, be aware of who can see your screen. You can even put a mirror on your desk (or leave mirrored sunglasses) to watch for your boss coming with your fingers ready on the alt and tab keys!
- To be safest of all, you could just copy and paste websites you want to read into Word documents, then either bring them to work on a USB stick to read them, or upload them to your personal e-mail account's drafts folder and download them from there, but don't save them to your work computer. You can also do other personal projects like this, such as work on your own blog or help format articles for our [library](#). Better still, write your own account of your [working life](#) or your [one woman/man workplace rebellion](#) and post it up on libcom!

So, anyone got any more suggestions? Any missing categories? What are your top tips?

Images from the Comedy Central TV show, Workaholics

Beating the bailiffs guide



Getting overloaded with debt and don't know what to do? This article contains useful advice, tips and contacts for dealing with debt and bailiffs.

Overloaded with debt? Bailiffs threatening you? Some useful advice from WAG...

Firstly, get advice from your local Citizen's Advice Bureau. They are busy, but very helpful.

Bailiffs firms and the police break the law if they think that they can get away with it.

Knowing your rights, and making sure that the Council and Bailiffs have followed legal procedures, should buy you some more time.

Several key things to take note of:

- Your possessions can't be seized unless you've been sent a written notice by the Authority at least 14 days before any visit. This must have details of any fees they have added on.
- The police have no power to force entry on behalf of the bailiffs or local authority, unless there is a breach of the peace.
- Lock all windows and doors. Bailiffs have no powers to force entry by breaking open an outer door, which is locked or bolted.
- If the bailiffs do get in, offer what you can afford to pay, not what they want you to pay. Ask them to drop the costs they have added.
- Bailiffs can only take things that belong to you the debtor. If you have a receipt proving that an item belongs to someone else, they cannot take it.
- Bailiffs cannot have you put in prison. If they never get in and you do not pay they will return your case to the court. The magistrate will then look at what you can afford to pay.

If you're still stuck and would like some help with taking on the bailiffs by whatever means are necessary, you could do better than get in touch with your local libertarian group (see our listings or ask in our [forums](#) for details) or ask your friends and neighbours to help you out. Walthamstow Anarchist Group also have more information about your rights against the bailiffs - see their website below.

If you are struggling with debt, both the Consumer Credit Counselling Service (0800 138 1111) and National Debtline (0808 808 4000) offer free information and advice.

Written by the [Walthamstow Anarchist Group](#)

Edited by libcom, last reviewed 2006

Dealing with accusations of benefit fraud guide



Some tips and advice for any claimants who are facing accusations of benefit fraud.

The Government spends hundreds of thousands of pounds talking about this but actually has little success prosecuting alleged fraudsters. It is important to remember that receiving benefits you are not entitled to does not automatically make you guilty.

Overpayments of benefits can be caused through official error and claimant error and may not actually be classifiable as fraudulent.

If you are accused of fraud by benefit agency staff don't pay any attention to their attitude, much of which may be bluff, as in the case of bailiffs.

Remember, you are allowed to agree or disagree with statements they ask you to sign and there should be no coercion on their part what-so-ever.

If you are found guilty you should always appeal.

Bear in mind that benefit underclaiming is much more widespread than fraud so never, ever, let them make you feel guilty and admit to anything.

Written by the [Walthamstow Anarchist Group](#)

Dealing with credit card debt guide



A short guide to help you deal with credit card debt, as consumer debt in the UK continues to spiral.

Cut it up!

You don't need to work for the Financial Times to realise that credit card debt is getting well out of hand. Ten years ago hardly anyone had one. Now there are 91 million credit and debit cards in the UK. Two fifths of our shopping is now put on the plastic. The net result is a large portion of the population with massive credit card debt. Given the extortionate interest rates charged this is seriously bad news for us and the source of gleeful hand rubbing for the high street bankers (what's that rhyming slang for I wonder?) who are pocketing it.

We see it like this. Credit cards have been introduced not to make our lives easier, but to extract money from us. Credit card debt acts like a mini mortgage – got to keep our noses to the grindstone so as not to miss any payments. We lived without them for years, and can start doing so again. To help you on your way to liberating yourself from plastic purgatory we have our "Cut it up" campaign. The first step in taking part is as easy as you make it. Get your credit card and take a pair of scissors to it. This may seem hard at first, but believe me, the feeling of relief when its done is immense. Worried about the debt you've accrued? The most important thing is not to panic. There's plenty of free advice you can get out there, and things really might not be as bad as you think. For starters, did you know the following?

- Credit Card debt is classified as "non-priority" debt. You can't be imprisoned for not paying non-priority debts and you are unlikely to lose your home or your essential goods.
- It is an offence under The Administration of Justice Act 1970 (amongst others) for someone in debt to be harassed by their creditor such as a credit card company or an agent acting on their behalf.
- Debts of under £5000 can only be heard at the small claims court. So even if you do get taken to court you can't be stung with solicitors costs if you lose.
- Debt collectors are not the same as bailiffs. Debt collectors cannot take any action against you, apart from asking you to pay any money owed.

- Regardless of what they say, you don't have to let bailiffs in. They are not allowed to force their way into your home unless you have let them in on a previous visit, hence the importance of never, ever letting them in. [Read more about how dealing with bailiffs](#)

We don't claim to be legal experts. We certainly don't claim to offer "impartial" advice either – we despise bailiffs, bankers and other creditors as much as anyone and support fair means or foul to get the better of them! Some decent, free, practical advice is available from The National debtline on 0808 808 4000. Their website is www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Alternatively, you could visit a local [Citizens Advice Bureau](#).

Written by the [Walthamstow Anarchist Group](#)

Dealing with street harassment guide



A guide for women with advice on how to effectively deal with sexual harassment in public.

Harassment is: Any number of acts or comments which make you feel physically or sexually unsafe or uncomfortable. They can be made by people you have known for years or by perfect strangers.

Basic Advice

If you are the victim of harassment, take the following steps:

Be safe

Safety is a priority. If you are in a situation in which you feel unsafe at all, remove yourself from it as quickly as possible. Do not put yourself in unnecessary danger for the sake of making a principled stand.

However, if you do feel safe enough to respond to your harasser, do the following:

1. Name the behaviour

For example, "Don't slap my arse. That's harassment" or "Don't make suggestive remarks to me. That's harassment" or "Don't talk about my body. That's harassment" or "Don't stare at me. That's harassment". You can also simply say in a strong voice, "Don't sexually harass women" or "Stop! That's sexual harassment."

2. Name the perpetrator

"You, the man in the blue pinstriped suit, get your hand off my breast" or "You, the driver of the blue Polo, don't stare at my breasts"

3. Use strong body language

Look the harasser in the eye and speak in a strong, clear voice. Be confident in what you say and do.

4. Do not apologise or ask a question

For instance, don't say "Excuse me...", "Would you...", "Do you realise...", "I'm sorry, but...", "Please..." etc

5. Do not get into a dialogue with the harasser

Do not answer any of the harassers questions. Simply repeat your statement or leave.

So, for example,

What you should *not* do:

You say, "Don't shout 'Nice tits' at me or any other woman. That's harassment".

He says, "Jeez, can't you take a compliment?"

Don't say, "Yes, I can take a compliment, but that's not a compliment. That's harassment."

He will then counter with something like, "Well, you're crazy if you take it that way. I meant it as a compliment."

This allows him to justify his behaviour to you, himself and anyone else standing around.

What you should do:

When he says, "Jeez, can't you take a compliment?" either leave the situation, having made your point, or repeat your statement. If he continues to try to engage you in a dialogue, either leave or keep repeating your statement.

6. Do not swear or lose your temper

For many harassers, the goal is to get a rise out of you, which is why they participate in this kind of behaviour. For them to see you getting angry or upset just encourages them to continue to harass both you and other people.

In addition, if a passer-by hears you shout out, "You f***ing arsehole!" when they have seen or heard nothing the harasser has done, they will tend to think you are the harasser. This, again, benefits the harasser, who can put on a "Can you believe this woman?" look. If you remain calm, it will be clear that you are the person being harassed and the perpetrator is in the wrong. It will also take away the reward (upsetting you) for their action.

Taken from [Anti-Street Harassment UK](#), edited by libcom

Gardening and food-growing guide



Personal advice and tips on growing your own fruit and vegetables to stay healthy and save money.

We all know the advantages of organically produced food, but why should we have to spend a fortune on organic fruit and veg? It is often from miles away, over packed, expensive, a bit manky by the time we get it and in some areas only available from supermarkets.

Another option for some people can be to grow it yourself. Producing your own food is a top buzz! It saves money (especially if you are growing more expensive or rarer varieties), keeps you fit, reduces food miles to food inches, tastes better, teaches you lots, and is a whole lot easier than people think.

Professional gardeners and gardening books have done a lot to portray food growing as something which only an experienced producer with a hundred acres, and tons of machinery and biocides, should even consider taking on. Small time growers are often poo-pooed and people with no access to land often give up before they've started.

But there is so much that can be produced with minimum space: mushrooms in the airing cupboard or on an old compost heap, endless summer salads from just six or seven square feet, pots of jam from just one mature currant bush, sprouted seeds from anywhere you can fit a jam jar and huge tomatoes in the cab of a parked up truck.

Try not to get disheartened by lack of space. It is quite incredible the yields that can be obtained from the tiniest plot, or even urban balcony.

There are many opportunities to get access to land. If you live in a town, you should be able to get an allotment. These are wonderful places to meet other gardeners, swap plants and pick up tips. These green oases are under constant threat from developers, so having an allotment is one of the best ways of protecting their survival.

Another option is to use other people's land. Ask to use a neighbours abandoned garden, advertise for one, or even squat!

WWOOF (Willing Workers On Organic Farms) is an excellent scheme that places people who want to garden or farm organically, both nationally and internationally, on fix-it-yourself placements. Placements can last from two days to years, usually for bed and board. A brilliant way to travel and grow.

There are several books. 'The Permaculture Plot - a guide to Permaculture in Britain', and 'The Organic Directory - your guide to buying natural foods" which lists organic farms and

small holdings that take working visitors. Similarly 'Diggers and Dreamers - a guide to Communal Living' lists intentional communities of varying type, who may take visitors. Although these options are nowhere near as the same as having your own garden they can offer experience, contacts and a chance to get started

So even if you haven't got a garden. Go on get growing! Grow some of your own healthy chemical-free food, even collect your own seed. Try it, it's not hard!

WWOOF tel: 01273 476 286

National Society of Allotment Growers tel. 0153666576

Permaculture Association tel: 01654 712 188

Henry Doubleday Research Association tel 01203 303 517

Soil Association tel: 0117 929 0661

The Permaculture Plot - a guide to Permaculture in Britain ISBN 1 85623 0104

Diggers and Dreamers - a guide to Communal Living ISBN 0 951494546

Organic Directory - your guide to natural foods ISBN 1 900322 03

Taken and edited by libcom from [Schnews](#)